0. INTRODUCTION

Pulp Fiction (1994) and its success at the Cannes film festival brought Quentin Tarantino to the attention of the big audience. Ever since, an almost endless amount of (popular magazine) articles and websites by enthusiasts has appeared. Although the journalistic articles are in the majority, this paper attempts to join both journalistic and scholarly studies. Trying to tackle the narrative construction of *Pulp Fiction*, and while giving an interpretation of its structure, this paper will touch upon *Pulp Fiction*'s indebtedness to film noir. Film noir had its peak in the forties and fifties but the noir genre, its style and content played an important role in cinema of every following decade. In the coming pages it will become apparent that *Pulp Fiction*'s relation with noir is not that straightforward. Since "[*Pulp Fiction*] was aggressively marketed by its producers Miramax who coupled its critical status with an emphasis on its generic qualities as a sexy noir thriller […]" (Spicer 154), one can expect that some noir characteristics are present. Yet, in contrast to this statement and the advertising machine behind *Pulp Fiction*, Tarantino refuses to claim his position in the film noir tradition: "I don't do noir. I don't do neo-noir […]" (Dargis[1]10).

This paper will remain true to the structure *Pulp Fiction* follows because this approach is most appropriate to stress the importance of the temporal construction. In the screenplay, Tarantino divided his story in three parts: a *Prologue*, the main part that consists of three stories, and an *Epilogue*. The three stories that form the body of *Pulp Fiction*, *Vincent Vega and Marsellus Wallace's wife*, *The Gold Watch*, and *The Bonnie Situation* are not only related because they share mutual protagonists, the subtitle of the screenplay indicates a thematic connection. Tarantino presents his *Pulp Fiction* as *Three Stories about One Story*, the latter perhaps referring to the plotline set off in the *Prologue*, only to be continued in the *Epilogue*. While following the path Tarantino lays out, the sidetracks of this paper will attend to *Pulp Fiction*'s connections with various films (noirs). This organization does not mean that this paper will result in a shapeless mass of references to different kinds of films, because in the end the sidetracks will rejoin the lost highway consisting of two lanes: the structure of *Pulp Fiction* and the question regarding the noir character of this film. In its appeal to the construction of *Pulp Fiction*, this paper tries to put the finger on the essence of what is likely more than a reservoir of pulp references.

1. PROLOGUE

In the opening scene of *Pulp Fiction* Pumpkin (Tim Roth) and Yolanda/Honey Bunny (Amanda Plummer) discuss their future as robbers. They have always robbed liquor stores but from this moment on, Pumpkin proposes, they will no longer put themselves in danger. From now on, they will rob restaurants, starting with the coffee shop in which they are sitting. The moment both stand up shouting at the customers to keep quiet while waving their guns, the screen freezes. The conversation between Pumpkin and Honey Bunny reminds one of a similar scene in *Bonny and Clyde*, a 1967 movie by Arthur Penn. After Clyde (Warren Beatty) has run into Bonny (Faye Dunaway) they eat together in a diner. The pair, who will soon become a notorious criminal duo, decides at the coffee table about their future together. Clyde convinces Bonny that she is worth more than being a waitress for truckers in a small town coffee shop. Clyde denigrates Bonny's customers similar to Pumpkin's description of the Koreans and Vietnamese who obstruct their future. Clyde sketches her situation and lays the foundation for their future cooperation. He promises Bonnie a break with her present life, just as Pumpkin assures Honey Bunny that they will change their life as liquor store robbers. Both scenes not only resemble each other because they function as catalysts in the criminals' plans, *Pulp Fiction*'s opening scene also visually echoes Penn's scene. Both criminal couples sit head-to-head at a diner table, the female character on the left side and the male one on the right side. [still 1-2] During both conversations a waitress serves them and, just like Clyde, Pumpkin takes the initiative and seems to assume the most authoritative position.

In his *Film Noir* (2002) Spicer includes Arthur Penn's gangster film in his inventory of films noirs. Spicer does not incorporate *Bonnie and Clyde* in what he calls "classical noir", which he assigns to the period between 1940 and 1959, but gives it the "modernist noir" label[1]. Manohla Dargis also describes the second wave of noir films in terms of a revival of a genre that went through its highlight in the post-war decades: "From *Bonnie and Clyde* to *Mean Streets* and beyond, pulp[2] defined the subject matter, look and texture […]" (Dargis[1] 7).

The core of Penn's narrative, a fugitive couple, is a common noir theme. The characters function as outcasts who want to escape the society they struggle with. Tarantino has always been interested in the depiction of couples. Not only are most of the protagonists in *Pulp Fiction* part of a duo, but in previous scripts Tarantino had already shown his fascination for criminal couples. In *True Romance* (1993), Tarantino's first script filmed by Tony Scott, Alabama (Patricia Arquette) and Clarence (Christian Slater) are lovers on the run. Oliver Stone altered another original script by Tarantino into his *Natural Born Killers* (1994) starring

Julliete Lewis as Mallory Knox and Woody Harrelson as Mickey Knox. “Both Alabama and Mallory Knox demonstrate an undying love for their crazed partners, and slowly but surely descend to murderous depths to keep their relationships on the right track” (Woodhams 84). This pattern is similar to the denouement of Penn’s narrative about Bonnie and Clyde who, doomed lovers as they are, embody the association between sexuality and violence. Penn reworks an essential theme of film noir as he uses their battle as an allegory for the individual in contemporary society (Hommel & Schotman 443). The individual finds himself in a problematic position in which he stands completely outside the social order and yet is constantly confronted with it. He (noir mostly focuses on male protagonists) is a product of the system and simultaneously forms its most intense critic. John Cawelti interprets the actions of Bonnie and Clyde as a “desperate and misconceived attempt to achieve some measure of the status, security and belongingness which ought to be among the basic gifts of a society to its members” (Cawelti 508). Like classic noir, *Bonnie and Clyde* elaborates the individual’s complicated condition. Society does not simply punish the criminals for their lawbreaking and violence but, if they are caught at all, the system is also brought into discredit. In contrast to noir, a traditional gangster film presents the gangster’s violence as it eventually leads to his self-evident destruction. In noir and in *Bonnie and Clyde* the equilibrium of good and evil is not that straightforward. The private detective, a stock noir character, often crosses the borderline between authority and illegality and is part of both the police and the criminal world. In a similar way, Bonnie and Clyde are not inherently evil; the viewer is puzzled when law abiders pursue and brutally execute them. Penn exposes the ambiguity of a system that wants to make a clear distinction between right and wrong.

> “Instead of simply reversing the meanings conventionally ascribed to the opposing forms of criminal and society in the gangster genre, *Bonnie and Clyde* expressed a more complex and dark awareness that this basic opposition was itself a mythical simplification, and showed us the deeper and more difficult irony of the twisted and inseparable fates of individuals and their society” (Cawelti 508).

The confrontation of criminals and the law-abiding society culminates in a violent retaliation on Bonnie and Clyde. Society kills the outlaw individuals “in a final ambush which set a new level in explicit screen violence” (508). Like Penn, Tarantino has been criticised for his excessive violence. Whereas Penn demythologises the comforting myth of proper and improper violence (508), Tarantino seems to integrate violence in his films for its filmic quality: “Violence in real life is terrible; violence in movies can be cool. It’s just another colour to work with” (O’Hagen 62).

The violence in Tarantino's films takes the spectator back to directors like Sam Peckinpah, who "is known as the father of the blood ballet, graphic slow motion sequences of flying limbs and broken bodies" (Dale et al. 258). Tarantino, who grasps every opportunity to quote from his expanding cinematic memory, has never hidden his affection for Peckinpah. He explicitly cites Peckinpah's *The Wild Bunch* (1969) as one of his favourite movies of all time. *The Wild Bunch* is a western often criticised as a raw and farfetched portrayal of the Old West that was afflicted by the director's passion for unnecessary violence (Hommel & Schotman 443). Like Tarantino in the nineties, Peckinpah was at the centre of attention every time cinematic violence was the subject of discussion. Although Peckinpah's films are not included in the noir cycle, he touched upon themes that are crucial in many noir films; he dealt with paranoia, problematic masculinity, and the ambiguity of violence. Critics who defended Peckinpah point to the vision behind his violence and reject the reproach that brutality was an unnecessary aspect of his narrations. Paul Seydor insists that Peckinpah's stylised violence intends to make a statement on the viewer's attitude towards (cinematic) violence: "it expresses something far darker and more subversive: the excitement of violence, the thirst for violence that brings us to violent entertainment in the first place" (20). Tarantino uses a similar motivation when he defends his own usage of violence. Bowden sees the scene in which Vincent (John Travolta) accidentally shoots Marvin in the head as a fine example of how violence works for Tarantino: "when Vincent accidentally shoots Marvin's head off as their car goes over a bump in the road the audience erupts into laughter, only to suddenly find itself confronted with the reality of what has just happened". Peckinpah and Tarantino claim the right to use violence by referring to the ambiguous position of the viewer and by defending their depiction of action as being realistic. "With Peckinpah, every bullet, hit and fall pricks or stings or hurts with real feeling. The action is always charged with an ambiguous, volatile tension" (Seydor 20). Tarantino has also stressed that both *Reservoir Dogs* (1991) and *Pulp Fiction* portray action in a realistic way. Yet, this statement seems in conflict with their attempt to depict violence stylishly.

Trying to defend Peckinpah and Tarantino, critics have made identical statements on the amount of gore in their films. In Peckinpah's case, Seydor poses "the question why Peckinpah's violent films are experienced as so much more violent when he is far from the worst offender – or even, as far as gore goes, an offender at all" (20). For Tarantino's sake, fans and critics (distinguishing between them is not always self-evident) have pointed to various scenes that are often at the centre of discussion but in which the violence is more suggested than it is actually shown. When Vincent plunges a needle into Mia's chest the

camera focuses on the faces of the protagonists whose reactions range from bewilderment to fascination. Their reactions, which perhaps anticipate the spectator's reaction, seem to be more important than the actual depiction of Vincent 'stabbing' her. Analogous to Seydor's defence of Peckinpah, Wild proposes a more differentiated approach of Tarantino's gore: "One real consequence of the artful brutality that has marked the movies Tarantino has made thus far is the reputation it has earned him – like Peckinpah before him - as the thinking-man's poet of violence".

In contrast to this positive assessment, critics have also objected the violence in Tarantino's films. The following statement on Peckinpah's movies seems to anticipate the critical reactions on Tarantino: "Over the years, Peckinpah's stylised vision and pessimistic reality has degenerated. […] And increasingly, a cartoon-like style has entered his now sporadic filmmaking" (Dale et al. 258). Of course, the discussion of violence in cinema is endless and, even more, individually coloured, but both directors emphasise the use of violence as a tool of their cinematic language. Films like *The Wild Bunch* and, in the noir tradition, *Bonnie and Clyde* can be seen as predecessors of *Pulp Fiction*'s depiction of violence. Their directors are all concerned with the graphic realisation of violence. Seydor put his finger on corresponding cinematographic techniques and the difficulties they bring about since "in *Bonnie and Clyde*, a film Peckinpah loved, Arthur Penn comes much closer to Peckinpah's ideal in the climactic dance of death; but even there, slow motion is a device that segregates the climax as a kind of set-piece" (Seydor 20). Despite a realistic intention, *Pulp Fiction* also demonstrates the problematic combination of a search for realism and a stylistic – thus artificial – depiction of violence. O'Hagan claims that Tarantino's films "blur the moral focus so much that people leave the cinema sympathising with killers and creeps and remembering the ultra-violence because it's so stylishly delivered" (63). This statement further complicates the violence in *Pulp Fiction*, and makes it part of a more general discussion on how violence in films can be related to a 'moral message'. Later in this paper, Butch and Jules (Samuel L. Jackson) – who are overtly violent at first but gradually distance themselves from violence – will appear to be significant for a moral reading of *Pulp Fiction*.

Leaving this aside on *Pulp Fiction*'s violence for what it is, *Bonnie and Clyde* once again returns to illustrate *Pulp Fiction*'s place in film noir tradition. Both films are marked by a style that playfully refers to film noir; this results at the same time in an incorporation and distancing of noir. This style links both *Bonnie and Clyde* and *Pulp Fiction* with an essential cinematic movement, the French New Wave. Spicer claims that: "*Bonnie and Clyde* was instrumental in gaining widespread acceptance for an irreverent, playful mixed-mode film-

making in the style of the New Wave" (135). Spicer refers to the French 'nouvelle vague', a term that gathers a number of French directors who, at the end of the fifties, renewed the film world in France. Its most important filmmakers are Jean-Luc Godard, Louis Malle[3] and François Truffaut, who were active in film criticism. In their film theory, which they published in the magazine *Cahiers du Cinéma*, they pleaded for a change in French cinema. Godard wrote articles "in which he did not refrain from expressing his admiration for directors of cheap Hollywood action movies, and simultaneously uttered his resentment of commercialism in the film industry" (Hommel & Schotman 226). The New Wave directors put their theory into practice in their films. Debuting in 1959 Godard "frappe un grand coup avec *A bout de souffle* qui fut le véritable manifeste de la 'Nouvelle Vague'" (Tulard 320). In their rebellion against the classic French cinema, New Wave directors grasped back to American movies of the forties and fifties. They mainly showed interest in movies strongly related to pulp literature. In his article *La Fiction du Pulp* Mick Sleeper asserts New Wave's bond with "pulp cinema":

> "The zealous admiration that Godard, Truffaut, et al. had for American genre films and the work of *auteurs* such as Welles, Hawks, and Fuller[4] often translated itself into their own work. Godard dedicated *Breathless* [*A Bout de Souffle*] to Monogram Pictures, purveyors of pulp cinema in the 1940s" (Sleeper 1).

Cinematographers like Godard and Truffaut consciously started from genre conventions. Godard's *A Bout de Souffle* and Truffaut's *La Sirène du Mississippi* (1969), for instance, both have fugitive couples at the core of their narration. Sleeper describes the opening scene of Truffaut's *Tirez sur le Pianiste* (1960) as being reminiscent of a typical film noir setting:

> "The first few moments of [*Shoot the*] *Piano Player* illustrate this: the establishing shot is straight out of an American *film noir*, a man running terrified down a dark street one step ahead of a sinister pair of headlights. He stumbles, crashes into a lamp post, and is revived by a passing stranger" (Sleeper 2).

Godard's *A Bout de Souffle* applies another type of reference to classic film noir. Its main character played by Jean-Paul Belmondo has the gesticulations of a noir character since he "plays at being Bogart, incessantly imitating his gesture of running his thumb across his lips" (Bruzzi, 26). This method of referring to film noir has instigated critics such as Sleeper and Fabian Ziesing to argue that Tarantino leans heavily on the French New Wave. "Throughout *Reservoir Dogs* and especially *Pulp Fiction*, Tarantino experimented with genre conventions just as Godard and Truffaut had in their earliest films" (Sleeper 1). Tarantino not only uses a similar style, he also explicitly refers to Godard and his films. Sleeper is one of the many

critics to have argued that the scene in which Vincent and Mia dance in a twist contest at Jackrabbit Slim's directly relates to Godard's *Bande à part*(1964). Tarantino acknowledges this intertextual reference as he admits his affection for Godard's musical scenes: "My favourite musical sequences have always been in Godard, because they just come out of nowhere" (Dargis[II] 18). According to Naremore Uma Thurman's haircut refers to Anna Karina (218). [still 3] The titles that appear on black frames and "the very spirit of the film's allusiveness" also refer to this example of New Wave cinema (218). In addition, Tarantino pays tribute to Godard by naming his production company 'A Band Apart'. Nevertheless, Naremore does not estimate *Pulp Fiction* and Godard's films to be equally allusive. "[*Pulp Fiction*] is light years from a movie like *Breathless* in the range of material it brings together and the demands it places on an audience. For all his talent, Tarantino's 'hypertext' is relatively narrow" (218). Naremore differentiates between Godard and Tarantino by claiming that the former is far more ironic and critical in his thoughts on mass culture. Whereas Tarantino celebrates various products of a commercialised consumerism, Godard remains faithful to his New Wave principles.

Beside influences from Godard, another important New Wave director, François Truffaut, also affects *Pulp Fiction*. Sleeper pays reasonable attention to *Pulp Fiction*'s affiliation with Truffaut's *Tirez sur le Pianiste*. Sleeper observes a similar upset in both films; Truffaut based his film on "*Down There*, a novel from one of the pulpiest of pulp fiction writers, David Goodis[5]" (2), Tarantino did not have one particular pulp resource in mind but glued all his personal recollections together. Sleeper notices that both films open in a way that is indebted to the noir tradition.

> "*Pulp Fiction* nicely echoes Truffaut's diversions. After the opening credits, we join Vince and Jules in an atypical gangster car, a Chevy Nova, cruising down an LA street – not on a rain soaked *noir* night, but in the early morning sunshine" (2).

Sleeper immediately points to the important changes that Tarantino makes. In contrast to Truffaut's opening scene, which is very close to the glooming darkness of noir, Tarantino chooses for a sun drenched Los Angeles. Nevertheless, both directors opt for contemporary settings that allow them to alter and expose genre conventions. Besides a similar mood, *Tirez sur le Pianiste* and *Pulp Fiction* share some analogous scenes. Truffaut presents conversations about diverse subjects that switch in tone similar to the chatter starring Jules and Vince. Sleeper draws a parallel between the two pairs of protagonists:

> "While Ernest and Momo [two criminals in *Tirez sur le Pianiste*] discuss loose women, show off their silly gadgets, and admit to wearing their sister's underwear, Vince and

> Jules are heard to debate foot massages, admit to masturbating, and scold each other for not using soap to wash their hands" (3).

The banal conversations that characterise both films cause an awkward tension with the situations in which the protagonists find themselves. These situations include typical gangster-like events such as killings, kidnappings, and shootings. The kidnapping in *Tirez sur le Pianiste* does not evolve in accordance with genre clichés. The sequence includes an extended discussion about the use of guns and the gangsters have trouble with the getaway car, which results in the kidnappers pushing the car with the kidnapped boy behind the steering wheel. Sleeper concludes that "[t]he gangsters in both [*Shoot the*] *Piano Player* and *Pulp Fiction* provide some of the best examples of how both Truffaut and Tarantino gleefully alter the conventions of the genre film" (3). Sleeper mentions another pair of corresponding scenes when he describes the scene in which Vincent accidentally shoots Marvin parallel with a scene from *Tirez sur le Pianiste*. "Just as Vince and Jules have to clean up their blood-splattered car after accidentally blowing someone's head off, Ernest and Momo struggle with a milk bomb that Charlie's little brother Fido splashes on their windshield as they prepare to kidnap Charlie" (3). In both films, unexpected misfortune forces the gangsters to overcome rather trivial consequences. Unlike bringing hostage Marvin to Marsellus Wallace for further interrogation, Vince and Jules have to scrape his skull of the backseat. Tarantino's liaison with Truffaut cannot only be detected on the level of the story. A number of allusions to Truffaut's films illustrate the playful character of Tarantino's referential policy. Tarantino plays with the boundaries of narration when Mia addresses a hesitating Vincent with "you can get a steak here, daddy-o. Don't be a – " (Tarantino 52) while she is drawing an extradiegetic square on the movie screen. In a similar way, Truffaut crosses the margins of his narration when he pushes the literal meaning of a character's statement beyond the filmic reality.

> "In [*Shoot the*] *Piano Player*, Fido doubts that Momo's scarf is made of metal as he claims; "I swear on my old lady's head," Momo exclaims, "May she die if I lie!" Instantly we cut to an old lady keeling over" (Sleeper 3).

Vincent replies Mia with a movie reference of his own, "After you kitty-cat" (Tarantino 52) that echoes Roman Polanski's *Chinatown* (1974)[6] (Naremore 216). Another reference to Truffaut can allegedly be found in Jimmy's reply to Jules: "Don't fuckin' jimmy me, Jules" (Tarantino 148), alluding to Truffaut's *Jules et Jim* (1961).

The preceding paragraphs have shown that Tarantino shares a playful relationship to pulp and the noir tradition with Godard and Truffaut. Yet, these directors of the French New Wave are not part of the noir tradition, they prelude the noir revival of the seventies. Directors like

Godard already anticipated the more ironic attitude essential for neo-noir filmmakers almost a decade later. *Bonnie and Clyde* is one of these modern noir films and its link with *Pulp Fiction* has exposed a noir theme in *Pulp Fiction*. Does *Pulp Fiction* have more in common with the noir tradition than this specific storyline and some detailed references to second-generation irony?

This question remains to be answered as *Pulp Fiction*'s structure will be further analysed. The Pumpkin and Honey Bunny storyline bridges the entire film; we open the film in the coffee shop and, after the development of three stories, arrive back in the coffee shop for the denouement of the film. *Pulp Fiction* is framed by a noir cliché yet Tarantino breaks it up through his temporal structure. If Pumpkin and Honey Bunny's plan had evolved in true noir tradition, they would probably have ended up dead like Bonny and Clyde. The lethal combination of love and violence leads Penn's couple to a death scene that includes more bullets than *Pulp Fiction* and *Reservoir Dogs* combined. Yet, for some reason *Pulp Fiction*'s criminal couple are allowed to survive a certain cliché death. The explanation 'must' be found in *Pulp Fiction* itself, namely in those scenes that separate the chronological development of the couple's plans.

2. THREE STORIES ABOUT ONE STORY

The core of *Pulp Fiction* consists of three stories: Vincent's meeting with Marsellus Wallace's wife, the story of the gold watch, and Jules and Vincent's confrontation with Wolf. At the basis of these plotlines are stereotypical pulp situations. Tarantino has acknowledged this inspiration and explicitly mentions that *Pulp Fiction*'s "jumping-off point was *Black Mask* magazine" (Dargis[I] 10). *Black Mask* was a pulp magazine that saw the light in the 1920s and included writings from Dashiell Hammett, Raymond Chandler, and James M. Cain. These authors are of significant importance for the noir tradition since many of their novels were adapted into screenplays. Dashiell Hammett, who is often considered the inventor of hard-boiled fiction, wrote *The Maltese Falcon* (1930) that made the screen in 1941 with Humphrey Bogart as detective Sam Spade. Bogart, an icon of (noir) cinema, joined Lauren Bacall in the 1946 adaptation of Raymond Chandler's *The Big Sleep* (1939). In the same year, James Cain's *The Postman Always Rings Twice* made it to the screen starring Lana Turner and John Garfield. These on-screen realisations of their novels resulted in a considerable amount of noir classics and the atmosphere and characters that came about in their pulp writings form one of the most solid pillars of film noir. Pulp literature is also significant in awarding the label 'film noir'. French film critic Nino Frank[7] used the label – almost posthumously – for the first time in 1946. In the following decade, French intellectuals debated about the post-war reception of American films and "noticed a thematic resemblance between these motion pictures and certain novels published under the generic title of 'Serie Noire' […] to designate a type of detective fiction" (Silver & Ward 1). The titles of these publications were translations from the American hard-boiled writers related to *Black Mask* magazine. The discussion culminated in the first book-length study about film noir, *Panorama du film noir américain* (1955) by Raymond Borde and Etienne Chaumeton.

Although Tarantino admits the influence of pulp writers, he explicitly stresses that the actual realisation of the *Pulp Fiction* screenplay deviates from its pulp origins:

> "I don't know how much I am actually influenced by those guys […] but I have read them all and I like them. The idea behind *Pulp Fiction* was to do a *Black Mask* movie – like that old detective story magazine. But I just finished the script and it's really not like that at all" (Davis & Womack).

Nevertheless, *Pulp Fiction* is linked with pulp literature and movies on various levels. A few years after *Pulp Fiction* Tarantino affirmed his fondness of pulp by adapting a novel by a more recent pulp writer, Elmore Leonard, to the screen in his *Jackie Brown* (1997). Leonard's

Rum Punch (1995) is "a modern pulp noir whose characters are ordinary people with modest dreams, which they still find difficult to realize" (Spicer 172-173). Tarantino slightly alters Leonard's modern noir novel, but in this film he holds on to the linear storyline. Spicer points to a significant change in *Jackie Brown*: "Tarantino takes the tone and mood as well as much of the storyline, from Leonard, but crucially makes the heroine black not white" (Spicer 173). Hereby Tarantino is able to go to work with blaxploitation movies. Pam Grier, who plays the main protagonist Jackie Brown, was a genre icon in the seventies. Leonard also influenced *Pulp Fiction* since "with his cool-jerk repartee, Travolta personifies the sort of self-invented thug found in the crime novels of Elmore Leonard" (Johnson).

2.1 The Bonnie Situation – the briefcase

The three central stories of *Pulp Fiction* clearly refer to typical pulp situations. The story that opens the body of *Pulp Fiction* involves Vincent and Jules who are closely linked to Marsellus Wallace. Marsellus orders them to retrieve a mysterious briefcase that is in the hands of some inexperienced youngsters. According to Caroline Jewers "the basic blueprint of films like *The Maltese Falcon* [1941][8] is at the heart of *Pulp Fiction*, since one image and object dominates the unravelling of the narrative, and visually links disparate pasts of the story" (55). When the briefcase is opened, a golden glow appears and the actual content remains unclear to the spectator. The briefcase with mysterious contents spreading a glow on its bystanders is reminiscent of a classic example in the tradition of *The Maltese Falcon*, *Kiss Me Deadly* (1955) by Robert Aldrich, in which a box that contains radioactive material is the object of desire and destruction. [still 4-6] Through the threatening and destructive aspect of the box, Aldrich is not only able to amplify the theme of nuclear fear in post-war America, but – according to Silver – he also portrays modern man's journey towards an almost mythical level. The quest for the mysterious box "becomes the quest for the cleansing, combustible element, for the spark of the purifying fire that reduces the nether world of *Kiss Me Deadly* to radioactive ash" (Silver & Ward 158). As in *Kiss Me Deadly*, the quest for the briefcase in *Pulp Fiction* could be interpreted as a search for meaning. Marsellus Wallace, in charge of Los Angeles' crime world, possesses the briefcase that seems to represent valuable knowledge. Everyone who glances into the briefcase is somewhat stupefied, as if struck by a sudden insight. He cannot allow this precious item to be in the control of inexperienced young guys; therefore his hit men Jules and Vincent have to return the briefcase to him.

The viewer gets a first impression of Jules and Vincent on their way to the youngster's apartment. Though their appearance might lead to the assumption that they are unmistakably part of a gangster tradition, some details prevent a clear-cut conclusion:

> "Vincent and Jules […] dress in black suits and pencil-thin ties, like Lee Marvin in the remake of *The Killers*[9]. [But] both men eschew hats, and instead of slicked-back hair, they adopt the styles of the 1970s: Vincent has long tresses, and Jules has jheri curls" (Naremore 216).

Nevertheless, Jules and Vincent's appearance alludes to a style prominent in the gangster tradition. Their suits are not only reminiscent of the gangsters in Tarantino's own *Reservoir Dogs*, the outfits also refer to predecessors such as Martin Scorsese's *Goodfellas* (1990), Jean-Pierre Melville's *Le Samouraï* (1967)[10], previously mentioned *A Bout de Souffle*, and Howard Hawks's *Scarface* (1932) (Bruzzi). [still 7-9] These films, from both the American and the French gangster tradition, share stylised criminals consciously preoccupied with their appearance as a gangster icon. The gangster's set of clothes, originally "modelled on the mobsters that dominated the prohibition years" (Bruzzi 26), directly links their look with their status. They combine glamour and violence in an ambiguous idealisation of or a parody on gangsterism. The uniform often epitomises the male character's obsessive maintenance of not only his status as a gangster but also of his masculinity. Tarantino embroiders this theme in his *Reservoir Dogs* in which the protagonists's costumes alludes to "Melville's use of the snap brim and trench coat in *Le Deuxième Souffle*, *Le Samouraï* and other films" (Bruzzi, 27). Melville combines the disaster of film noir with the mysterious undercurrent reminiscent of Jean Cocteau[11] (Hommel & Schotman 386) and is considered a model for the French New Wave. In the sixties he made a couple of gangster films that inspired Tarantino to say: "[w]hen Jean-Pierre Melville was making his crime films, he talked about how it was very important that his characters have a suit of armour" (Dargis[II] 17). Tarantino has applied this approach in his own films; the gangsters in both *Reservoir Dogs* and *Pulp Fiction* are dressed in similar outfits that function as "suits of armour." In *Reservoir Dogs* Tarantino depicts the increasing breakdown of the individual criminals and the male bonding by the gradual destruction of their costumes. "The defeat of the gangsters […] is symbolised by the disintegration of their look: the loosening of ties, the removal of glasses, the drenching of shirts in blood" (Bruzzi 27).

In *Pulp Fiction,* the gangster protagonists go through a similar procedure. Vincent and Jules are dressed in their gangster outfits when they meet their boss to receive their orders, and continue doing so while executing Marsellus Wallace's instructions. "When you first see

Vincent and Jules, their suits are cut and crisp, they look like real bad-asses" (Dargis[II] 17). Vincent also wears his cool suit of armour when he takes Mia out. When Mia forces him to abandon his criminal shell by joining her in the dance competition Vincent takes out a piece of his costume, namely his shoes, to start dancing on his socks. After an entertaining evening, they return to the Wallace residence and while Mia puts on some music, Vincent draws back into the bathroom not only to recompose himself but also to redress. He barely has the time to get himself together before Mia overdoses and messes up his costume while he revives her with the aid of his dealer Lance (Eric Stolz). This disintegration of his look can hardly be compared with what happens to the costumes of Jules and Vincent in their search for the briefcase. When they want to bring one of the youngsters as a hostage to Marsellus Wallace, Vincent accidentally blows his head of. The car and their suits are covered with blood spatters and brain tissue, in order to clean themselves they have to strip and put on a new set of clothes, which is almost a direct opposite of their gangster wardrobe. As the plot evolves "their suits get more and more fucked up until they're stripped off and the two are dressed in the exact antithesis – volleyball wear, which is not cool" (Dargis[II] 17). Although both are forced to dress in volleyball clothing, Vincent and Jules keep up their cool. [still 10-13] Nevertheless, their change of clothing seems to anticipate a transformation that will show its significance later.

Part of Vincent and Jules's cool comes from their trivial conversations. While driving to the soon-to-be crime scene, they discuss banal differences between Europe and America. This chitchat continues during their arrival at the apartment building. Upon turning up at the front door, Tarantino delays the expected continuance with the aid of his characters' conversation. Jules says "It ain't quite time yet, let's hang back" (Tarantino 21) and – in a manifestation of Tarantino's playful style – a visual trick follows this statement: [still 14]

> " 'Let's hang back,' Jackson says, and they do, literally, by walking away from the camera down a hallway. In long shot, they carry on a[n] innocuous, funny conversation. Finally, it's time for the kill. […] They walk into close-up and are once again frightening" (Alleva).

This scene demonstrates that Tarantino likes to use a conspicuous visual style in his movies, but does his shooting generate meaning or is it a mere visual distraction? In noir tradition, the camera's point of view is relevant to the film's themes and the elaboration of the character. A classic example of how camera technique supports an interpretation can be found in a characteristic noir shot that encloses the protagonist in an entrapping frame like a window, a doorframe or – more literally – the trellises of a cell. The scene under discussion in *Pulp*

Fiction seems to lack a connection between visual style and thematic significance; the perspective only refers to a character's statement. Nevertheless, the camera angles reveal something about Tarantino's approach. In an interview with Gavin Smith Tarantino describes how his style of shooting language functions in his movies. "One of the things I like doing is incorporating many different styles of shooting in the course of making a movie. I never shoot in one specific cinematic language. I like using as many as are appropriate". Tarantino acclaims different styles of shooting and does not discern techniques that are restricted to the noir or gangster cycle. Yet, in justifying his use of different camera angles Tarantino emphasises his use of "forced perspective", a term he further specifies as "[t]he camera's taking some odd point of view" (Smith). The use of odd angles is one of the trademarks that determine the visual style of classic noir. Tarantino backs his statement by referring to a scene between Fabienne and Butch in the hotel room: [still 15]

> "[Due to] the perspective outside the doorway during the scene between Bruce and Maria, which is set up that way so you feel like you're a fly on the wall, [viewers observe] these people alone together acting like people act when they're alone. […] It should be somewhat almost uncomfortable and embarrassing being in the room with them" (Smith).

Tarantino's choice of perspective is not always merely a stylistic exercise; it does incorporate a vision, but it is far from noir's usage of odd angles.

Jules, whose words instigated the "forced perspective", seems to be aware of his literal aside as he exclaims his wish to return to the story. Upon his "let's get into character", a statement that illustrates Jules's insight in his own stock character features, they resume their standard job of hit men. They enter the apartment and play the impressive, violent roles they are supposed to assume. Nevertheless, they remain somewhat stuck in their banality. Even when Jules addresses the young guys he asks him about his fast food. This enquiry soon develops into an outburst of macho violence as Jules and Vincent 'finally' live up to the expectations. Jules quotes his notorious bible passage[12] and Vincent and Jules shoot the young boy. At this moment, that will later appear to be of crucial value when he returns to this storyline, Tarantino interrupts the denouement of the plotline concerning Vincent and Jules. The scene fades into black and a title card with *Vincent Vega and Marsellus Wallace's wife* appears.

2.2 Vincent Vega and Marsellus Wallace's wife

The main part of the *Vincent Vega and Marsellus Wallace's wife* part of *Pulp Fiction* has Mia Wallace and Vincent Vega as its most important protagonists. Marsellus has ordered Vincent to take Mia out, but Vincent is already aware that this situation is potentially dangerous. Jules has told him about a guy who gave Mia Wallace, a former actress (albeit on a pilot), a foot massage and was tossed out of a window. This story contributes to the mystification of the boss's wife and already alludes to an eventual violent retaliation should Vincent 'cross the imaginary line' while dating Mia.

When Vincent is about to meet Mia the initial moments of their first acquaintance build up a tension that answers the viewer's expectations. Tarantino consciously started from a genre cliché: "[t]he guy takes out the mob guy's wife – "but don't touch her". And what happens if they touch? You've seen that triangle a zillion times" (Dargis[I] 10). The on screen introduction of Mia answers to this formula, nevertheless Tarantino has presented Mia less directly in his final film version than he initially intended while writing *Pulp Fiction*'s screenplay.

In the original script Vincent enters Wallace's house and comes in direct contact with Mia as she, "naked with her back to us, talks to Vincent through a crack in the door. The door shields the front of her body from Vincent" (Tarantino 44). In the film, the confrontation is less straightforward because after Vincent has read the note through Mia's voiceover, he enters the house and hears Mia over the intercom. Instead of Mia's nakedness being obviously present, the first moments of their conversation are marked by distance since Mia talks into a microphone and watches Vincent on a video screen. Vincent acts hesitantly; he does not find the intercom immediately, and has difficulties using it. The changes Tarantino made while shooting however do allude to Mia's sexuality. After an initial shot of her back Tarantino introduces Mia fragmentally: first he shows her lips talking in a microphone, then her fingers handling a lever that controls the movement of the camera following Vincent, an image that preludes Mia's authority over Vincent. Later the viewer sees her hands preparing a line with a razor blade and the back of her head while sniffing the drugs. Tarantino completes the fragmented introduction of 'the object of desire' by showing her feet[13]. Just before Vincent is allowed to see Mia in her entirety, he observes a painting depicting Mia. All these instances contribute to the mystification of Mia's sexuality. [still 16-19]

Vincent cannot answer the overkill of urges stimulated by Mia's desirability and the drugs he took just before meeting Mia. His self-restraint is forced by the threatening presence of Mia's husband, "[b]ut even more than allegiance to his boss, it is loyalty to a code of masculine

ethics which dictate that one must not commit adultery with a more powerful man's wife" (Fried). In the following scenes, Vincent seems to have trouble to adopt an appropriate attitude. Mia is in control; she decides to go to Jackrabbit Slim's, whereas Vincent is doubtful at first but is persuaded by Mia: "an Elvis man should love it […]" (Tarantino 51). Vincent wants to avoid acting like a tedious sap and enters "the big mama of 50s diners" (51). Nevertheless, his walk seems unbalanced when he steps out of his Malibu to follow Mia to the diner.

Jackrabbit Slim's is, as its slogan says, "the next best thing to a time machine" (Tarantino 51) and references to the fifties are all over the place. Vincent's entrance introduces the viewer to waiters and waitresses who are replicas of fifties icons, movie posters on the walls, booths made out of fifties cars, screens playing movies instead of windows looking out on the street, and Ricky Nelson performing on the dance floor. As Vincent enters the diner, he seems estranged from reality before Mia calls him back and they sit down. The tension between Mia and Vincent continues in their conversation that recalls the sexual attraction between so many protagonists in Hollywood history. In these scenes, as much as elsewhere in *Pulp Fiction*, "the dialog [sic] has the sound of an improvisation – actors bullshitting – but the staging and editing are classic genre stuff, with forced perspective, sensational angles, and dramatic use of shadow and color" (Dowell).

Tarantino focuses on the face-to-face confrontation switching from one protagonist to the other following the cross-talk. While exchanging glances, Mia asks Vincent for a cigarette:

> "Will you roll me one, cowboy?
>
> You can have this one, cowgirl.
>
> Thanks.
>
> Think nothing of it." (Tarantino 54)

Vincent politely keeps distance while Mia continues her role of seductress. [still 20-22] Buddy Holly (Steve Buscemi)[14] brings her the five-dollar milkshake and, being very much aware of her sensuality, "Mia wraps her lips around the straw of the shake" (57). A few moments later, she brings the cherry to her lips and plays with it while expressing her thoughts on uncomfortable silences: "[t]hat's when you know you found somebody special. When you can just shut the fuck up for a minute, and comfortably share silence". Again, Vincent steers clear of her: "[w]ell, I don't think we're there yet. But don't feel bad, we just met each other" (59). While Mia leaves Vincent to think of a subject for their conversation and goes to the bathroom to 'powder her nose', Vincent sees a replica of one of the foremost

icons of female sexuality, Marilyn Monroe, in one of her notorious poses: the skirt of her white dress blowing up while she lets out a squeal. [still 23]

Playing the role of seductress to stereotypical perfection, Mia has become more of an icon, like Marilyn Monroe, than a complete character. Yet it is Vincent knowledge of fifties icons that enables him to outsmart Mia. She thinks that there are two Marilyn Monroes, but Vincent points out the difference between Monroe and Mamie Van Doren adding, like a true film geek, that it must be Jayne Mansfield's night off since she is absent this night[15]. This seems to give Vincent the confidence he needs to confront Mia with the story about the man Marsellus threw out of a window, allegedly because he had touched Mia. Nevertheless, Mia remains in control; she carries on her witty dialogue and eventually prompts Vincent to pose his pressing question.

"Let's just forget it.

That is an impossibility. Trying to forget anything as intriguing as this would be an exercise in futility.

Is that a fact?

Besides, it's more exciting when you don't have permission" (61).

Vincent still evades addressing Mia directly and especially when being asked about the alleged reason why Marsellus defenestrated Tony 'Antwan' Rocky Horror he remains hesitant. Mia takes the initiative time and time again and directs the conversation:

"Well don't be shy, Vincent, what exactly did *they* say?

Vincent is slow to answer.

Let me help you, Bashful, did it involve the F-word?" (62)

Mia forces Vincent in the submissive position and is very aware of her powerful position. When Ed Sullivan announces Jackrabbit Slim's twist contest Mia decisively reacts on the request to join the competition. Vincent does not want to dance, but Mia – explicitly using her authority over Vincent – is able to persuade him.

"I wanna dance.

No, no, no, no, no, no, no, no.

I do believe Marsellus, my husband, your boss, told you to take me out and do whatever I wanted. Now, I want to dance. I want to win. I want that trophy.

(*Vincent sighs*) All right.

So, dance good.

All right, you asked for it" (65).

Vincent does more than making a virtue of need, and removes all the restraints he previously had. They "break into a devilish twist" (64) and win triumphantly.

The dance contest, and the continuation which the viewer does not see, seem to have altered the relationship between Mia and Vincent. When they return to Wallace's house they are cheerful; Mia throws the keys to Vincent, who opens the door, and both "dance tango-style into the house" (67). They have abolished the former hierarchy and having dismissed all boundaries that stood between them, a stereotypical climax of the evening seems to be at hand. Especially when they stop dancing and stand face to face, the "uncomfortable silence" is on the brink of evolving into a fulfilment of the sexual tension present the entire evening. [still 24-27] Yet, the expected continuation is prolonged because Mia attends to music and drinks and Vincent "shuffles off to the john" (67).

While Mia puts on *Girl, you'll be a woman soon* by Urge Overkill and dances around in Vincent's coat, Vincent is in the bathroom talking to himself in the mirror. He is aware of the possible outcome once he returns to the living room and tells himself to leave Mia quickly but gently. He even reflects on his responsibility towards Marsellus: "it's a moral test of yourself, whether or not you can maintain loyalty. Because when people are loyal to each other, that's very meaningful" (69). Apparently, Vincent is still not able to put the overwhelming presence of Marsellus aside. His restraint seems to be instigated by self-preservation rather than by respect for his boss or Mia because:

> "[d]espite his comments about the "meaningful" nature of fidelity and friendship, Vincent's loyalty finds its motivation not in his affection and esteem for Marsellus, but in his fears about the mob boss's possible retaliation for such a personal indiscretion" (Davis & Womack).

Vincent, and the viewers with him, will never know whether he had succeeded in leaving Mia and avoiding the wrath of Marsellus because when he returns to the living room, Mia has overdosed. Vincent immediately realises the results of this incident: "Fuck *me* … fuck *me*" (in the movie) and "*I*'ll be a sonofabitch" (in the original script) [my stresses]. Mark Conard reads Vincent's frenzied attempt to save Mia as another manifestation of his narcissism:

> "He tries desperately to save her, not because she's a fellow human being, but because she is Marsellus's wife and Vincent will be in deep trouble if she dies. Mia has value because Marsellus has made it so, not because of any intrinsic or objective worth, features, or characteristics she may possess" (Conard).

In comparison with the beginning of the sequence, power relations are completely reversed. At first Mia was in control of the situation and of Vincent, now she is literally in the hands of

Vincent, her life depends on his actions. In film noir terms, one could even consider Mia's change as an evolution from femme fatale to a damsel in distress. Nevertheless, despite her looks and manners, Mia never had bad intentions with Vincent. She seemed to be after a good night's fun rather than wanting to lure Vincent into death or betrayal. However, fact is that Vincent is in deep trouble because of her, albeit because of her ignorance rather than her deliberate behaviour.

In comparison with classical femmes fatales or their modern equivalents in films such as *Basic Instinct* (1991), *The Last Seduction* (1993), *Lost Highway* (1997), or *L.A. Confidential* (1997) Mia Wallace is almost a good girl. In these examples of noir inspired films, women go to the limits, if they have them at all, to reach their goals. In the aforementioned films Sharon Stone, Linda Fiorentino, Patricia Arquette, and Kim Basinger take the archetypical role of femme fatale to new dimensions. They use their sexuality more explicitly than Mia Wallace does in *Pulp Fiction* and fulfil the role of neo-noir women in a way Ruby Rich describes as "pure evil, with sexuality and greed the primary markers of character" (8). These films are more overtly linked with the noir tradition as they explicitly introduce themes such as paranoia, conspiracy, and betrayal. *Lost Highway* for instance updates the male anxieties about women and the expression of male fears through a 'double role' by Patricia Arquette. In *Lost Highway*, David Lynch also uses a specific score that includes, beside contemporary songs, a significant amount of jazz music. Like classic noir, Lynch uses his music to express the disorientated condition of the protagonists. This brief aside undoubtedly derogates from the merits of these movies, but within this paper on *Pulp Fiction* they contribute to a more differentiated approach of Mia Wallace's fatale femininity.

The following actions stress even more that Vincent deeds are – at least largely – inspired by self-preservation. Explaining Lance the seriousness of the situation Vincent stresses the imminent vengeance of Marsellus. Lance wants to keep off the overdosing Mia, but when Vincent – with the overdosing Mia literally at his feet – appeals to his own self-preservation Lance is forced to help:

> "This fucked up bitch is Marsellus Wallace's wife. Do you know who Marsellus Wallace is? Do you? […] Now if she fuckin' croaks on me, I'm a grease spot. But before he turns me into a bar of soap, I'm gonna be forced to tell 'im about how you coulda saved her life, but instead let her die on your front lawn. Now, come on, help me, help me" (Tarantino 74).

They lay Mia in Lance's living room and, in another instance of Tarantino's delaying techniques, Lance starts searching for his little black medical book, while discussing with

Vincent and his wife Jody (Rosanna Arquette). Then they frantically argue about how and where to inject Mia with the adrenaline. Finally approaching the inevitable climax of the scene, Vincent asks Lance to count down. The camera focuses on the faces of the participants and the syringe before Mia resurrects with a shock. Instead of the expected fulfilment of the sexual tension, Vincent plunges a needle into Mia's chest. Viewers likely see a sexual metaphor in this scene, and Tarantino's reference to horror films – which is made explicit by the description "Lance demonstrates a stabbing motion, which looks like 'The Shape' killing its victims in *Halloween*" (Tarantino 80) – obviously does not counterproof such a reading. [still 28-32]

Soon the protagonists, especially the female ones, recover and take up their previous 'cool' attitude. When asked to say something if she is okay, Mia – adopting her wittyful role again – answers in a relatively unaffected voice: "Something" (81). In the original screenplay, Jody concludes the tense scene by asking if "anybody want[s] a beer" (81). In the film Jody comments in a similarly distant way: "that was fuckin' trippy" (81). This contrasts to the men who, flabbergasted, "collapse on their backs, exhausted and shaking from how close to death Mia came" (81).

After a silent ride through scarcely lit streets back to Wallace's house, Vincent and Mia agree to keep silent about what has happened. Mia claims that she would be in equal trouble should Marsellus find out about her almost dying of an overdose. Vincent, off course, doubts this and wants to shake on their agreement. Vincent and Mia approach, in contrast to their previous homecoming there was a big distance between them up to this point, and explicitly shake hands. [still 33] To confirm their resolution Mia tells her Fox Force Five joke and, as she walks inside the house, "Vincent continues to look at where she was. He brings his hands to his lips and blows her a kiss" (84). Vincent has succeeded in restraining himself, although an unfortunate twist of fate helped him a hand, and was able to stay alive, at least for the time being.

2.3 THE GOLD WATCH

On the narrative level of the plot, *The Gold Watch* is the last story; the most recent story thus finds itself at the centre of the movie. At the basis of the third story is again a valuable object that has to be retrieved, this time Butch has to recuperate his father's gold watch. A flashback explains the origin and the importance of the watch in a long monologue by a Captain Koons. He is played by Christopher Walken, "who parodies his famous role as a Vietnam veteran in

The Deer Hunter[16]" (Naremore 217). He was in Hanoi together with Butch's father and he tells the five-year old Butch, from whose perspective the entire scene is shot, about his father and the origin of the gold watch. [still 34] First the Vietnam veteran stresses the male bonding he experienced during the war: "Hopefully, you'll never have to experience this yourself, but when two men are in a situation like me and your Daddy were, for as long as we were, you take on certain responsibilities of the other" (Tarantino 85). This statement makes Butch already at a young age aware of the importance of masculinity and anticipates the situations the older Butch will face. When Butch is an aging boxer, he is confronted with an opponent in the ring, later stands face to face with a hitman, and meets his former boss in a scene that features an important test of (male) honour. Captain Koons amplifies the significance of masculine heritage as he tells the history of the gold watch. He paints its origins from Butch's great-grandfather, over the loyal Winocki[17], to the struggle Butch's father and he had to endure to pass on the watch. Captain Koons says, "The way your Daddy looked at it, that watch was your birthright" (Tarantino 86), and hereby introduces the notion of patriarchal legacy. To conclude his speech he addresses the young Butch as a premature version of the grownup adult: "Little man, I give the watch to you" (Tarantino 86). These words bring about conscientiousness in the young Butch, which will give the older Butch a reason to go after his watch despite the dangers it involves. Tarantino has included this war veteran's monologue in *The Gold Watch*, originally a story by Roger Avary, to be clear about Butch's motivations and not let the watch come out of nowhere (Dargis[II] 18).

The war veteran is one of the stock characters in noirs and repeatedly enables the treatment of post-war anxiety and the complexities of masculinity. In the figure of Captain Koons *Pulp Fiction* introduces a Vietnam veteran who touches upon this themes. The inheritance of the gold watch and the stress on patriarchal legacy bring the problematic masculine position in Butch's life. Yet, the Captain Koons Tarantino provides, keeps far away from the often-psychotic, maladjusted veterans in film noir tradition. This typical noir theme found its culmination in Martin Scorsese's depiction of Vietnam veteran Travis Bickle in his *Taxi Driver* (1976). [Still 35] This film is seen as the instigator of the noir revival and has Robert DeNiro depicting a lost soul in New York who struggles with himself, sexuality, and the society that surrounds him. He resorts into violence and embodies the outsider in a disillusioned city. This prototype of a war veteran contrasts with Captain Koons who is, as his uniform indicates, still part of the army and who seems to suppress eventual post-war traumas. Nevertheless, he anticipates the notions of honour and degenerating masculinity that will appear to be significant in Butch's further life. The fatherless Butch seems to be haunted

by nightmares and, like his girlfriend Fabienne, the viewer is left wondering to what extent he is traumatised by his past.

After the monologue, the title card *The Gold Watch* appears and the viewer suddenly finds him– or herself in a dressing room where a boxer wakes up. As a boxer, Butch follows his male predecessors into battle and cannot allow to be forced to renounce his honour and flop. Apparently, Captain Koons's monologue is linked with the boxer, but the actual relevance of the watch will only become clear when Butch realizes that his girlfriend Fabienne has forgotten to bring it. First, Butch still has to complete a fixed fight. Viewers remember the planning of this plot in a conversation between Butch and his boss Mr. Marsellus Wallace in which Marsellus ordered the aging boxer to put his pride aside[18]. Again, a plotline reminiscent of noir films is at the basis of a story; Butch finds himself "in a situation that resembles noir boxing movies such as *The Killers*, *The Set-Up*, and *Body and Soul*[19]" (Naremore 217). Yet, Tarantino does not show "the most brutal fight this city has ever seen" (Tarantino 88) in which Butch chooses to go against the will of his boss. He kills his opponent Floyd Wilson in the process and has to run, not for the always-absent police but for the wrath of Marsellus. In the dressing room, Marsellus – again shot from the back [still 36][20] – orders the execution of Butch in the presence of his wife, Vincent, and English Dave[21]. Mia and Vincent are reintroduced and – in accordance with their previous agreement – they maintain a polite distance. Vincent has resumed his function as hitman in the service of Mr. Wallace and Mia, playing her subservient role of the boss's wife in every following appearance, has hardly any significance.

The first phase of Butch's escape takes place in a cab where he first hears about the death of his opponent. With the background noticeably fake, the scene inside the cab visually refers to the cinema of the past. [still 37] Naremore claims that Butch in the backseat of a cab driven by a beautiful woman with a black-and-white process screen in the background is reminiscent of *The Big Sleep* (1946) (217). Even if Tarantino did not intend to point to this specific film noir, the scene undoubtedly refers to a technique characteristic of early Hollywood cinema.

When asked about how it feels to kill a man Butch passes lightly over it, "I don't feel the least little bit bad" (Tarantino 94)[22], and continues to throw his boxing gear out of the cab's window. While redressing himself Butch is literally and figuratively leaving his boxing career behind. The Columbian cab driver Esmarelda Villa Lobos tries to draw him into conversation and asks about the meaning of his name, upon which Butch again displays his indifferent attitude: "I'm an American, our names don't mean shit" (Tarantino 94). Butch carries on his tough role while calling his partner in crime to get confirmation about the success of their

scheme: “Who gives a fuck? It’s over now. Enough about the poor unfortunate Mr. Wilson, let’s talk about the rich and prosperous Mr. Butch” (Tarantino 95). At this point, the money he will receive from the bet is Butch’s main concern. This last scene illustrates the first phase of Butch’s escape, which is strongly linked with film noir; the boxer – a tough and emotionless character – flees the authorities (in this case only his boss) with self-preservation and personal enrichment being the goals of his actions.

Soon however, he breaks with his previous attitude and the motivations for his behaviour change. Women, the cab driver and – especially – his girlfriend, seem to play an important role in the sudden shift in Butch’s conduct. Butch arrives at a motel and leaves Esmarelda Villa Lobos after another mutual agreement of see-nothing hear-nothing between a man and a woman. He joins his, also foreign, girlfriend Fabienne whom Gormley describes as “the Godardian, ethereal New Wave heroine.” Others have described her as “the stereotypical weak woman who is reliant on her husband for brains and for support” (Weston & Ruggiero). Nevertheless, she seems to stimulate Butch to drop his tough façade and to become an affectionate and caring lover. At least, until Butch wakes the next morning after another nightmare, which causes the viewer to wonder whether his past haunts him, and realises that Fabienne has left his father’s watch on the kangaroo at the bedside table in their apartment.

Just before, Butch had suddenly woken up while the television was broadcasting a motorcycle movie that shows “a bunch of Hell’s Angels taking on the entire Vietnamese army” (Tarantino 104) and – perhaps not yet recovered from his bad dream – said that “it’s a little too early in the morning for explosions and war” (106). Tarantino uses a movie to call up the violence Vietnam veteran Koons referred to, perhaps suggesting that Butch’s nightmare also relates with this trauma. The fugitive couple starts the day the way they ended the night before with sweet and loving talk, which is suddenly interrupted by Butch’s request for his watch. He starts a manic search for his father’s heritage and burst into a rage when he understands that his girlfriend has left it in their apartment. He no longer speaks in sweet words but uses abusive language and throws the television against the wall. Butch soon tempers his fury and acts as if Fabienne is not to be blamed; yet he stresses the importance of the watch in a way that seems to reduce Fabienne to an object he desires less than his watch: “If all I gave a fuck about was my watch, I should’ve told you” (Tarantino 111). He says that he has no time to go further into the meaning it has for him. Unlike Fabienne, the viewer possesses the background information needed to understand Butch’s position.

On his way to retrieve the gold watch, Butch unmistakably vents his frustration with Fabienne’s negligence that causes him to put himself in a dangerous situation. “In ironic

moments that recall noir heroes trying in vain to escape their doom, Butch is drawn closer to the mobsters he wants to avoid" (Chumo 81). Once again, Butch is forced to act in accordance with the noir expectations and turns to the hardboiled side of his character. This switch does not come about lightly; Butch's struggles are made clear by a scene cut from the completed film in which he ponders for an instant about his decision. In what seems an almost schizophrenic sequence he forces himself to stop Fabienne's Honda in the middle of the road and step out of the car and start "pacing back and forth, talking to himself, oblivious to passersby and traffic" (Tarantino 114). Butch stages being his father and excuses himself for not going back for the watch before he addresses himself and eventually persuading himself to return. At this time, Butch makes his motives explicit:

> "This is my war. You see, Butch, what you're forgettin' is this watch isn't just a device that enables you to keep track of time. This watch is a symbol. It's a symbol of how your father, and his father before him, and his father before him, distinguished themselves in war. And when I took Marsellus Wallace's money, I started a war. This is my World War Two. That apartment in North Hollywood, that's my Wake Island. In fact, if you look at it that way, it's almost kismet that Fabienne left it behind. And using that perspective, going back for it isn't stupid. It may be dangerous, but it's not stupid. Because there are certain things in this world that are worth going back for." (Tarantino 114 – 115)

In this extensive quote, Butch touches upon the issues that persecute him. He puts his place in the male legacy into words reminiscent of Captain Koons, and he describes his actions as a boxer double-crossing his boss as an act of war. Furthermore, he links the watch with his personal fate. He explains Fabienne forgetting the watch in their apartment as his own doom; he simply has to go back. Similar to many noir films, there is no escaping his destiny. Yet, Butch motivates his actions with respect to the tradition he is part of and does not refer to mere materialistic objectives like he did in the first phase of his escape. The very explicit nature of Butch's flow of words, in combination with it largely repeating what was already implicitly present in Captain Koons's monologue have perhaps instigated Tarantino to remove this scene from the completed film.

Butch's quote is a first step towards an explication of his transformation: "When he goes back for the watch, he ceases to be a double-crossing thug, and becomes a noble knight and a defender of sacred values" (Hochenedel). Butch approaches his apartment cautiously and is able to enter it and find his watch without any problems. He is so much at ease that he prepares himself a toast. At that moment, Butch's eye falls upon something that distresses

him, the viewer is left ignorant for some instances and then learns that someone has left a gun on the counter. When Butch hears the toilet flush, he knows that someone is in his apartment to kill him. The bathroom door opens and who stands in front of him? Vincent, a hitman Butch has already briefly met in Marsellus's bar. This meeting took place when Vincent and Jules returned the briefcase and Butch received Marsellus's orders. Their previous encounter was marked by hostility as Butch and Vincent, who did not know each other at that time, exchanged defiant looks and words. This scene introduces "the theme of the uncanny and destiny" because "Vincent's immediate reaction of hostility toward Butch proceeds unexplained" (Villella). Now, they find themselves opposing each other, but unlike a western duel they are not equally matched as Butch holds Vincent's gun and Vincent has a pulp novel[23] in his hands. The toaster takes the catalytic function the stroke of the clock performs in many westerns[24] and Butch kills Vincent. The hitman finds his end in what seems to have been a constant in his life: the bathroom.

Butch is relieved and care-freely drives away. But then coincidence comes into play again; Marsellus crosses the street and sees Butch waiting at a crossroads in his Honda Civic in a scene that reminds of Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960) in which Janet Leigh stops at a set of lights to see her boss crossing the road. [still 38-39] Again, Butch finds himself in a face-to-face confrontation with one of his enemies. This time he tries to kill his opponent by hitting him with his car. Both injured men stumble into the Mason-Dixon pawnshop where Marsellus's pursuit comes to a surprising end. The name of this pawnshop might be indicative as "upon crossing this symbolic line, Butch and Marsellus both become slaves" (Hochenedel). Butch holds his former boss at gunpoint but is put to a hold by the shop owner. When Butch and Marsellus wake up, they find themselves held hostage by two hillbillies and a leather-hooded character called The Gimp.

In *Pulp Fiction* the police seem to be absent; Vincent and Jules are aware of their suspect outlook after killing Marvin in their car and try to avoid a confrontation with the cops, but the only character that comes close to being a cop is Zed, one of the two hillbillies, who is dressed in a uniform. Zed is anything but the authority that comes with the police uniform, moreover, he and his partner Maynard appear to be sadomasochistic perverts. The scenes in the pawnshop are reminiscent of John Boorman's *Deliverance* (1972), a film that tackles the issue of male bonding and features similar violence. Butch and Marsellus "seem to be reliving his father and Captain Koons's Vietnam experience in a POW camp: "that Hanoi pit of Hell", as Captain Koons calls it in Butch's dream" (Chumo 82). While Marsellus is being raped, Butch succeeds in escaping from the hellish basement, but confronted with the opportunity to

leave his archenemy behind, he faces a moral choice. Butch is clearly struggling with the idea of running off while the man he was about to kill himself is now on the verge of being killed by his rapists. The escape with his girlfriend Fabienne to the roots of the family in Knoxville, Tennessee is luring, but – with a plate from Tennessee on the pawnshop's wall in the background [still 40] – he decides to return and save Marsellus. "Butch decides for the life of him, he can't leave anybody in a situation like that" (Tarantino 128). Chumo analyses that in this life giving decision "Willis is given the chance to take his action hero persona and stretch the moral parameters of that genre" (82).

For the third time in *The Gold Watch* Butch is confronted with death: the first time he kills his opponent in an unseen fight, next he kills Vincent in self-preservation, then he kills Maynard to save Marsellus Wallace. This last instance of violence appears to be different from his previous actions: "when Butch returns to the cellar to aid Marsellus, violence for the first time acquires justification as an act of honor." Conard further analyses this development as a "conspicuous progression in the meaning and relevance of violence." The transformation of Butch from a ruthless boxer to a "warrior" is epitomised by his choice of weapon:

> "He picks up a big destructive-looking hammer, then discards it: not destructive enough. He picks up a chainsaw, thinks about it for a moment, then puts it back. Next, a large Louisville slugger[25] he tries on for size. But then he spots what he's been looking for: a Samurai sword" (Tarantino 128).

The range of weapons not only represents "a catalogue of weapons in film" (Chumo 82), they are also icons with very different backgrounds. The first two weapons Butch chooses (in the film a hammer and a baseball bat) are symbols of Americana (Conard); next Butch tries a chainsaw that makes him "Leatherface in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, and finally he's Robert Mitchum in *The Yakusa*[26]" (Naremore 218). The hammer, baseball bat, and chainsaw are tools, banal weapons that contrast with the samurai sword, which "gives Butch a certain moral weight" and incorporates him in "an ancient tradition of warfare" (Chumo 82). This tradition of warriors is not only a historic reality, Butch's choice for the sword also makes him part of a tradition of samurai films[27]. [still 41-46]. "When the samurai sword becomes his weapon of choice, one can feel the legacy of cinematic masculinity nodding in approval of Tarantino's excessive gesture" (Fried).

Tarantino gradually builds up from the trivial tools to the gracious weapon and again leaves the viewer briefly ignorant before showing Butch's ultimate weapon. [still 44] The decision for this particular weapon completes Butch's conversion. His choice seems to be a confirmation of the importance he attaches to the past and honour already encountered in his

flashback to Captain Koons's monologue. Butch assesses great value to the gold watch, which represents his respect for his (male) predecessors and combines the significance of his family heritage with his fascination for time.

Throughout *The Gold Watch* Butch demonstrates his obsession with time. "If anyone in *Pulp Fiction* is obsessed with time, it is Butch; after all, he is the only character with a family history – beholden to a larger time frame, and also bearing the weight of that past" (Chumo 80). His dream has illustrated the burden of successive generations who each went to war and passed on the watch. After waking from his dream, "his trainer enters his dressing room and declares, "It's time, Butch," a fitting epigraph for the episode" (Chumo 80). Butch's time has come: Marsellus forces him to lose his final fight because "your days are just about over" (Tarantino 34). After the fight in which he conquered the myth of the aging boxer, Butch phones his associate and tells him "Next time we see eachother, it'll be on Tennessee time" (95). Fabienne seems to have "a freer, more relaxed attitude toward time (81)". Her remark, "Any time of the day is a good time for pie" (109), and her negligence about bringing the watch illustrate this. When Butch learns that Fabienne has forgotten his father's watch, he has no time to explain the importance of the watch because of his occupation with the quest. After having retrieved his watch, he is held hostage in a pawnshop, "a place where history is preserved through a collection of junk and antiques" (Chumo 82). Later, while making his redemptive decision in the pawnshop, various clocks hang on the walls. [still 47] He chooses a weapon with great historic value to save his former archenemy and enables him to "get medieval" (Tarantino 131) on his rapist. Butch escapes his past as Marsellus's boxer on a chopper, significantly called Grace, and "is travelling toward his future by going back to the family past where time (as represented in the watch) began" (Chumo 82). When he arrives back at the motel where Fabienne is staying, he urges her to hurry up because they do not have a lot of time before the train for Knoxville leaves. Knoxville is also Tarantino's birthplace, which causes Chumo to consider that "the chronological end of *Pulp Fiction* circles back not just to Butch's beginnings but to the director's actual beginnings so that *Pulp Fiction* becomes a personal time machine for Tarantino himself" (82).

Butch's attention for time also seems to give him the edge over Vincent. Vincent overcame his own battle with time as he won the twist contest in Jack Rabbit Slim's ("the next best thing to a time machine") in the presence of various duplicated icons of the past, and was able to resurrect Mia before she would go to 'icon heaven'. Nevertheless, Vincent does not break out of his role as gangster at the service of Marsellus. He remains unchanged by his

confrontation with time, appears to gather no knowledge from his past experiences. Moreover, unlike Butch, he is motivated by the wrong reasons:

> "In contrast to Vincent's over-arching, ethically fractured drive for self-preservation, Butch's moral sensibilities emanate from his fidelity and respect for his late father, his genuine affection for his girlfriend, Fabienne […], and the humanity that he discovers within himself when confronted with the power to decide the fate of his mortal enemy" (Davis & Womack).

Butch overcomes narcissism and does not limit himself to the orders Marsellus gave him. This eventually saves his former boss and himself, despite having lost his Los Angeles privileges. In the original screenplay Butch and Marsellus first "shake hands, then hug one another" (Tarantino 131) before Butch hits the road. In the film, Butch's depart is more hesitant and his attitude is more distant. They are far from being friends; "There is no me an' you. Not no more" (131), Marsellus says, but he acknowledges that Butch has saved him and lets him go.

> "By forsaking the door to Tennessee to save his enemy he not only receives forgiveness from Marsellus, who would have previously tracked him to the ends of the earth, but also finally earns the right to wear his father's gold watch". (Bowden)

Butch joins his girlfriend Fabienne and "the two lovebirds peel away on Grace" (Tarantino 135) as they leave Los Angeles and the crime underworld regulated by Marsellus Wallace.

2.4 THE BONNIE SITUATION – JIMMY AND MR. WOLF

As Fabienne and Butch fade out, a title card with *The Bonnie Situation* appears. The viewer sees a nervous young man sitting in a bathroom while Jules is lecturing in the background. This scene repeats a previous scene from a different angle and thus allows another approach to the moment Jules refers to as a divine intervention. Tarantino again picks up the thread he left behind just before the story on Vincent Vega and Mia Wallace; Vincent, who was killed in the preceding story, and Jules execute Brett after quoting a bible passage, leaving Marvin trembling with fear in the corner of the young guys' apartment. Perhaps the revitalisation of Vincent shows that he is also able to surmount time, albeit through artificial narratological construction. Keeping in mind the evidence Tarantino provides, Vincent's death in the previous story rather accentuates the inevitable doom he faces being a hitman not apt to change.

At this moment, Vincent has yet to escape a premature death when the fourth young man rushes in from the bathroom screaming, "Die! Motherfuckers! Die!" and firing his gun empty

at Vincent and Jules. Both stand unharmed and, after an instant of confusion [still 48], gun down the unfortunate shooter to "take him out of the scenario" (Tarantino 137). Already after having his protagonists reassume their hitmen roles through Jules's statement "Let's get into character" (23), Tarantino again uses the dialogue to refer to the filmic 'reality'.

The immediate response of Jules and Vincent to their salvation differs as Vincent, "after a moment of respect, shrugs it off" (137), recomposes and adopts his hitman attitude. He walks over to Marvin and confronts him: "why the fuck didn't you tell us about that guy in the bathroom? Slip your mind? Forget he was in there with a goddamn hand cannon?" (137). Jules, still stunned, utters that they should be dead and looks at the bullet holes in the wall. Vincent already seems to have put aside the previous events and reduces it to mere luck. This statement stirs Jules: "That shit wasn't luck. That shit was somethin' else. […] That was … divine intervention. You know what divine intervention is?" (139). Vincent replies sceptically as Jules expands on the divine intervention: "Do you wanna continue this theological discussion in the car, or at the jailhouse with the cops" (139). Jules refuses to let Vincent deny the phenomenal nature of what just happened: "we just witnessed a miracle, and I want you to fuckin' acknowledge it!" (139).

Vincent waves aside the possibility of a divine intervention and, as they continue their discussion in the car, he brings up an example from popular culture referring to the TV show *Cops* in which – according to Vincent – happened a similar "freak" (140). In his answer to Vincent's persistent denial Jules comes to the essence of what this incident means for him: "If you wanna play blind man, then go walk with a shepherd. But me, my eyes are wide fuckin' open" (140). Apparently, the divine intervention has evoked a conversion in Jules. Duane Bidwell devotes his article *"Let's get into character": A Narrative/Constructionist Psychology of Conversion in Quentin Tarantino's Pulp Fiction* to Jules's transformation in terms of a postmodernist conversion. Bidwell claims that Jules has a religious background, incorporating his metamorphosis in the traditional psychology of conversion. Jules's conversion is thus a product of a long process that culminates in an event of divine intervention:

> "[His] conversion appears sudden, but we have no idea how long it has been percolating. Judging from his reliance on "scripture" in his work […], Jules is familiar with the rhetorical style of the Hebrew Bible and New Testament" (Bidwell 332).

Bidwell sees evidence for this statement in the quote from the Bible Jules claims as Ezekiel 25:17[28]. However, the actual text cannot be found in the Bible but is an amalgam of existing quotes from Ezekiel 18, 25, 34, Psalms 23, and Genesis 4 mixed with passages that sound

biblical but do not originate from the Bible (Bidwell 335). Despite its imagined status, the quote plays an important role in Jules's conversion because "in storying his conversion, making sense of what has happened and planning what will happen next, Jules places his past, present, and future life into the framework of that text" (336). Later, when Jules clarifies his plans for the future to Vincent, he will expatiate on the meaning this text has in his life.

Vincent remains unaware of the importance the miracle had for Jules. He does not understand that Jules wants to give up his life as a hitman and when Jules tells him to stop blaspheming, Vincent exclaims: "you're fuckin' freakin' out" (Tarantino 140). Vincent sees Jules's interpretation of the divine intervention as a mere joke and ludicrously reacts on Jules's statement that he will tell Marsellus that he is quitting: "I'll bet ya ten thousand dollars, he laughs his ass off" (Tarantino 141). Upon which Jules significantly answers: "I don't give a damn if he does" (141). Next, Vincent wants to consult Marvin who is in the back seat, but before he can give his opinion concerning the matter of divine intervention, Vincent accidentally shoots him.

Their car covered with blood, Jules and Vincent are confronted with one of the rare times they are aware that the police is a realistic threat. But once again the police are conspicuous by their absence. Tarantino described a previous scene as "Vincent driving like a madman in a town without traffic laws" (70) in his attempt to save Mia. [still 49] The lawlessness of *Pulp Fiction*'s Los Angeles is a reminder of many noir films that had Los Angeles as their crime scene. The absence of a law controlled by a police force is a trademark of almost every noir city. Los Angeles has a reasonable reputation as a noir city; it functions as a background and almost becomes an extra protagonist in a variety of films noirs. From noir classics such as The *Big Sleep* (1947), over modern noirs like Roman Polanski's *Chinatown* (1974), up to more recent *Devil in a Blue Dress* (1995) by Carl Franklin, Curtis Hanson's *L.A. Confidential* (1997), *Heat* (1995) by Michael Mann, and in films of David Lynch and Tarantino, Los Angeles plays a significant role[29].

Instead of falling in the hands of the cops, Jules and Vincent turn to the one omnipresent force in the Los Angeles crime world, Marsellus Wallace. Marsellus has no allies in this part of the city but as soon as Jules and Vincent find their refuge in a friend's house, Jules calls upon their boss to solve the situation. In the suburb house of Jimmie, who is played by Tarantino, Jules explains Marsellus via the phone "what an explosive element this Bonnie situation is" (151). Once again, time pressures the protagonists to act swiftly. Jimmie's wife will return from her work in an hour and a half and if she finds two criminals and a dead corpse in her house Jimmie's marriage will be ruined.

For the first time in *Pulp Fiction*, Tarantino hints at a family situation that seems to approach a normal standard, whatever that may be. We know nothing about the family lives of Jules or Vincent and the couples present up to now are on the run (Butch and Fabienne), a criminal duo (Pumpkin and Honey Bunny), a drug dealer and his crazy wife (Lance and Jody), and a crime boss and his dame (Marsellus and Mia). Even when their respective homes are present in the film, they do not function as a place of refuge or safety. Butch and Fabienne have left their apartment and live in motels before they flee to an unseen place that may offer a real homecoming; Lance deals in his house where the dying Mia is brought back to life after having an overdose in Marsellus's house. The domestic environments in *Pulp Fiction* do not seem to function as such; this absence of normal family relations is a symptomatic feature of noir films.

Although *The Bonnie Situation* repeatedly refers to family life and comes as close to a family unit as *Pulp Fiction* gets, Jimmie's house in the suburbs is taken completely out of context when it is used to clean up the mess after the unfortunate incident. Jimmie, who apparently knows Jules from the old days, disregards his family heritage when Jules and Vincent use his best linen that was "a wedding present from my Uncle Conrad and Aunt Ginny" (Tarantino 157) to cover up the blood on the back seat. Nevertheless he fears a divorce should Bonnie find out that his house is used as a "dead nigger storage" (148) and Jules recognizes the stress of the situation when he urges Marsellus to send the cavalry to solve the problem. He imagines Bonnie coming home from her work and seeing her husband and two strangers carrying a dead man in her living room. In this on-screen imagination, we see another couple of mixed races, Jimmie being as white as Tarantino and Bonnie being a black nurse. Jules persuades Marsellus, sitting at his breakfast table with his white wife Mia again in the background, to send The Wolf.

The Wolf works at the service of Marsellus Wallace and considering Jules's reaction when Marsellus mentions his name he has quite a reputation. In the following scenes, The Wolf profiles himself as a perfect symbiosis of professionalism and cool gangster style. Through this character Tarantino is not only able to vent his fondness of sophisticated gangsters, he also seizes the opportunity to honour an actor who was important in the early stages of Tarantino's career. Harvey Keitel, whose decision to help produce *Reservoir Dogs* eventually led to Tarantino's success, grasps back to his role in *Point Of No Return*, an American remake of *La Femme Nikita*[30], in which he portrayed a cleaner. Marsellus calls The Wolf and gives him an update of the Bonnie situation. The Wolf writes down some notes[31] and almost takes on mythical proportions when he says, "It's about thirty minutes away. I'll be there in ten"

(Tarantino 152). Tarantino even stresses The Wolf's ability to overcome time as he arrives at Jimmie's house, according to an on-screen title, "Nine minutes and thirty-seven seconds later" (152). [still 50-51]

The moment he enters the house The Wolf immediately takes control and starts giving orders. Vincent is none too happy with his appearance and demands respect from him: "a 'please' would be nice" (156). Already when confronted with the delicate situation Vincent stood to his guns by saying that "if the price of that favor is I gotta take shit, he can stick his favor straight up his ass" (145). He seems to have a hard time realising that they find themselves in difficult circumstances, which they can only tackle if they are ready to take up their responsibilities and clean up their own mess. The Wolf, being a professional, does not lose his cool and appeals to the one factor that will undoubtedly persuade Vincent to leave his pride for what it is: "I'm not here to say 'please'. I'm here to tell you what to do. And if self-preservation is an instinct you possess, you better fuckin' do it and do it quick" (156). Vincent slightly backs out of it claiming that he did not want to show disrespect but that he just does not like to be ordered around. Something that is rather peculiar for someone who is under the command of Marsellus Wallace and has no problem following his orders. Marsellus's substitute stresses the urgency of the situation and with an irony only available to people in authority pushes Vincent to hurry up:

> "If I'm curt with you, it's because time is a factor. I think fast, I talk fast and I need you guys to act fast if you want to get out of this. So pretty please, with sugar on top, clean the fuckin' car" (156).

Again, this statement stresses the importance of time forcing the protagonist into actions they would rather avoid. Clearly not satisfied with The Wolf's attitude and with Jules as go-between, Vincent starts to clean the car.

While they are sweeping up blood and picking up bits and pieces of skull and brains, Jules and Vincent once again end up discussing a spiritual matter. This time Vincent brings the notion of forgiveness under discussion. "Jules, did you ever hear the philosophy that once a man admits he's wrong, he's immediately forgiven for all wrongdoings?" (158). Despite acknowledging God's intervention and going through a transformation Jules is not ready to accept Vincent's theory of instant absolution. Being in these distressing circumstances by Vincent's fault, Jules cannot forgive him. Moreover, Jules realises that he is doing the hardest part of the work and forces Vincent trade to "brain detail" (159). While doing so, he describes his state of mind in terms of *Superfly TNT*, *Guns of Navarone*, and – only in the screenplay – Jimmie Walker[32]. Pulp Fiction's protagonists seem to exist and act in terms of popular culture,

in particular cinema, as Tarantino frequently uses elements of film and television to describe their actions and states of mind.

At the same time, The Wolf talks to Jimmie in a scene framed by the doorframe. [still 52] Once again, this technique provides a distance between viewers and protagonists and refers to the noir style. In this conversation, The Wolf succeeds to persuade Jimmie into abandoning his family's heritage in favour of 'Uncle' Marsellus's compensation. During his visit, The Wolf acts like a businessman in control of the situation. With money, fast talk, and a powerful position he manages to direct his customers or subordinates. He makes the opportunistic decision to be friendly to Jimmie and seems to conspire with him as they force Vincent and Jules to strip and provide them with goofy volleyball clothing to complete their transformation.

The next scenes considerably differ from the screenplay; the completed film misses up to four pages from the original screenplay. Apart from some rather insignificant scenes, two similar deleted scenes are striking. Jimmie asks the criminals twice to pose for his camera, and despite the time pressure, they agree. Perhaps these scenes were meant to function as a comic reference to the position of Tarantino, who directs the film while playing the role of Jimmie. In a previous shot, viewers already saw Jimmie almost assuming the camera position in a similar reference. [still 53] Apparently, Tarantino thought it was not necessary or advisable to include Jimmie as a photographer in the eventual version of *Pulp Fiction*.

Tarantino has also cut a scene staged at Monster Joe's Truck and Tow. Was it because scenes as these had no actual significance or did Tarantino want to limit his already fairly long film? Probably a combination of both caused him to delete the mentioned scenes. In the film, viewers never get to see Monster Joe doing business with The Wolf. After agreeing on what road to follow to Monster Joe's[33], *Pulp Fiction* immediately jumps to The Wolf leaving the tow yard with Joe's daughter Raquel.

Outside Monster Joe's Truck and Tow Vincent and Jules are waiting for the man. They contain themselves as Raquel makes fun of their clothing and, after Raquel makes a joke Tarantino had already used before[34], they pay their respect to The Wolf. Both express their pleasure of having watched The Wolf work. In his turn, The Wolf allows them to call him Winston and while expanding on the notion of respect Tarantino has his protagonists again playing with the word 'character': "Respect for one's elders shows character – I have character – Just because you are a character doesn't mean you have character" (169 – 170). Vincent and Jules are left alone and decide to have breakfast together.

3. EPILOGUE

In the screenplay, Tarantino entitles the third segment of *Pulp Fiction* as the *Epilogue*. The film has no visual indication of this last part of *Pulp Fiction*, but if Tarantino assumes this structure in his screenplay, it is likely to be significant. At the coffee shop, Jules and Vincent resume their witty conversation; the stressful situation is behind them and finally they find themselves at ease. The subject of their chat once again puts the finger on a difference between Vincent and Jules. Vincent offers him a sausage, which Jules refuses to eat because he considers swine to be filthy animals. They push the matter of discussion to hilarious moments when Jules introduces 'personality': "I wouldn't go so far to call a dog filthy, but they're definitely dirty. But a dog's got personality. And personality goes a long way" (Tarantino 171). In the minds of Vincent and Jules, the triviality in their conversation takes a pseudo-philosophical dimension. Another important part of their frame of reference is popular culture, and when Vincent continues Jules's rationale and proposes that a pig would cease to be a filthy animal if it had a better personality, Jules reaches out to their common knowledge: "We'd have to be talkin' 'bout one motherfuckin' charmin' pig. It'd have to be the Cary Grant[35] of pigs" (172). Vincent is pleased to see that Jules has lightened up after being so serious about the alleged miracle. Soon however they once more start arguing about the nature of the freak occurrence if not miracle.

In the *Epilogue* Jules gradually makes his conversion more explicit. He overtly distances himself from Vincent's view on what happened:

> "You're judging this thing the wrong way. It's not about *what* [original stress]. It could be God stopped the bullets, he changed Coke into Pepsi, he found my fuckin' car keys. You don't judge shit like this based on merit. Whether or not what we experienced was an according-to-Hoyle[36] miracle is insignificant. What is significant is I felt God's touch" (172-3).

Jules refers to popular culture when describing *what* happened, but for him it is not the fact of changing a particular soft drink into another brand that is important. Jules stresses the significance of a divine presence, and this undeniable insight causes him to give up the life. After fulfilling his duty and returning the briefcase to Marsellus, he will walk the earth "like Caine in *Kung Fu*" (173). Kwai Chang Caine, played by David Carradine[37], was the main character in the action series *Kung Fu* in which a Shoalin monk wandered the earth. This statement once again indicates what authority film has for *Pulp Fiction*'s protagonists. Vincent does not attach much value to this sort of detached life, because "without a job,

residence or legal tender, that's what you're gonna be – a fuckin' bum!" (174). Vincent disclaims Jules's desire to leave behind the traditional values he himself cherishes, such as material possession and a 'profession'. Whereas Vincent describes Jules's new style of life as a lower form of existence, Jules sees his future as coming to terms with himself: "I'll just be Jules, Vincent – no more, no less" (174). Eventually Jules seems to give up his attempts to convince Vincent of his conversion, he respectfully accepts that there is an almost insurmountable difference between them: "look my friend, this is just where me and you differ" (174). Somewhat later, he even tries to force Vincent into leaving the object of their discussion behind: "if you find my answers frightening, Vincent, you should cease askin' scary questions" (174). A definite schism seems to be at hand, both hold on to their respective convictions and do not appear to lean towards a compromise. Before Jules can expand on "what alcoholics refer to as a 'moment of clarity'" (175), Vincent leaves Jules pondering at the diner table as he exits for the restroom. Nevertheless, Vincent refuses to give up the discussion and he sees his leaving as a short interruption before the existing patterns develop further: "I gotta take a shit. To be continued" (175).

During Jules and Vincent's conversation, the camera suddenly shifted to a customer asking for coffee. Viewers recognized Pumpkin from the opening scene and suddenly realise that Vincent and Jules are in the coffee shop that is about to be held up by Pumpkin and Honey Bunny. After Vincent has gone to the toilet Tarantino gathers up the thread he left behind at the freeze frame before the beginning of the first story. In the mean time, Tarantino has narrated three stories of which he claims in the screenplay's subtitle that they constitute one story. The notion of one story might lead to the assumption that the three stories between prologue and epilogue (in chronological order: *The Bonnie Situation* in two parts, *Vincent Vega and Marsellus Wallace's wife*, and *The Gold Watch*) share a common 'meaning' and might refer to the story of Pumpkin and Honey Bunny as framing them all.

The three stories could be summarised as Jules's redemption, Vincent's lack of transformation, and Butch's redemption respectively. The main characters of these stories all share a common aspect in their life, namely Marsellus Wallace:

> "Marsellus hovers over all the narratives and functions as the one concrete link between the protagonists and the milieu of the L.A. Underworld. Marsellus is constructed as the authoritative and controlling centre of the movie's narrative, in the sense both that he is the one who can get things done, and that he functions as the limit of what the other characters can and cannot do" (Gormley).

The position Marsellus takes in the narrative and the Los Angeles criminal underworld, combined with the core of the three stories, have urged Caroline Jewers to interpret *Pulp Fiction* in terms of Arthurian romance[38].

Jewers reads *Pulp Fiction* as "an inverted, subversive courtly romance" that exploits "the dangerous sense of self-destruction and redemption inherent in the best romance tradition" (45). *Pulp Fiction*'s narrative is particularly indebted to Grail romances as Vincent, Jules and Butch all 'quest' an object that represents great value. In a direct or indirect way, Marsellus is at the origin of these quests and his central position is similar to King Arthur's in his feudal world.

Marsellus himself takes only a central part of the action in *The Gold Watch*, in which he chooses the expression "git Medieval" (Tarantino 131) to ensure his rapists that they will have a short but painful future. In the other stories, he functions as a force over the other protagonists. He sends out his subordinates from his court, a topless bar significantly called Sally Leroy's. At this place "everybody's boss […] who sounds like a cross between a gangster and a king" (Tarantino 34) orders Butch to flop in his last boxing match, welcomes Jules and Vincent – no longer dressed in their suits of armour – who have retrieved his mysterious briefcase, and charges the latter with the task of taking out his wife Mia.

In the triangular relationship between Marsellus, Mia, and Vincent Jewers recognises Lancelot and Queen Guenevere who are "drawn together as much by circumstance and the seductiveness of power as by physical attraction" (Jewers 51), but Tarantino does not let the knight have a romance with the lady he saves. Instead, he chooses to serve his boss and by that decision, he saves his own skin. Butch fulfils the role of a "chivalrous loner" like Gawain whose "feudal duty can mean collecting payment and self-sacrifice of a less honorable kind" (50). Unlike Vincent, Butch has no ambition to become a Grail-knight under Marsellus. He flees the Los Angeles of Marsellus on a chopper called Grace, nevertheless after honourably saving his former boss using the weapon of the Japanese equivalent of the medieval knight. Butch's decision reinstates Marsellus as the powerful centre after two rednecks violated the top of the hierarchy. In the process, Butch looses the privileges that come with being part of Marsellus's court, but he does not seem to regret leaving Los Angeles for his 'homeland' with his girlfriend.

Butch and Jules, the other protagonist who is about to leave Marsellus's court, both share an insight that overcomes a "form of egotistical self-interest" (43). This quintessential evolution in romances is seen in Jules who, like "Perceval […] makes the transition from a secular to a religious code of knighthood that makes him from being a clumsy ingénu to being an

instrument of grace" (43). Jules completes his conversion in the diner. He seems to have made his decision, but before viewers can behold the 'new' Jules he is confronted with a final test as Pumpkin and Honey Bunny try to rob that same diner.

As Jules is still reflecting his transition, the camera cuts to Pumpkin and Honey Bunny jumping up from their booth. In a repetition of *Pulp Fiction*'s opening scene, they rise with their guns raised, but Honey Bunny addresses the customers in a slightly different way then at the beginning of the movie. In the prologue she says, "any of you pricks move and I'll execute every motherfuckin' last one of you" (Tarantino 13), whereas in the epilogue she shouts, "any of you pricks move and I'll execute every one of you motherfuckers" (175). Taking Tarantino's eye for detail into account it is highly improbable that this difference should be a mistake. Perhaps this small deviation already anticipates the change that occurred in the body of the movie.

While the criminal couple goes through the robbing routine they agreed on, the camera shifts to Vincent sitting on the toilet reading a pulp novel unaware of the events in the coffee shop. For the third time in *Pulp Fiction* Vincent finds himself in a restroom while important events evolve outside his knowledge. [still 54-57] The first time viewers saw Vincent in a similar situation he was self-reflecting in Marsellus's bathroom while Mia was overdosing in the living room. On another occasion Tarantino placed Vincent on a toilet in what would soon appear to have been his last toilet visit ever. In Butch's apartment, Vincent was reading the novel he apparently did not finish at the coffee shop while Butch enters and surprises him. Three times Vincent remains oblivious and, third time unlucky, Vincent ends up dead in Butch's bathroom.

In the mean time, the heist of the coffee shop is in full progress. Pumpkin and Honey Bunny collect the wallets from the customers until suddenly Pumpkin sees Jules. The camera takes Jules's position as Pumpkin approaches him. [still 58], and keeping Jules's previous violent outbursts in mind the tension increases. Jules drops his wallet in the bag Pumpkin holds out and at that moment, Pumpkin notices the briefcase. He points his gun at the briefcase and asks what it contains but to his own surprise, Jules refuses to open it. Honey Bunny, who was not yet involved in the discussion, nervously joins the two men as the situation is about to turn ugly. Pumpkin holds Jules at gunpoint and starts counting down. In the screenplay, Jules closes his eyes and vividly imagines shooting both robbers like he shot the young men in the apartment while retrieving the briefcase. In the film, Tarantino shows no visual realisation of a pending violent outcome. Nevertheless, viewers can imagine Jules weighing both

possibilities and one might anticipate Jules killing those who obstruct him in returning the case to Marsellus.

Jules chooses for a third option and opens the case. Pumpkin stares with amazement at its contents. Honey Bunny repeatedly asks what is in the case but, like the viewers, she remains ignorant. Jules makes use of Pumpkin's bewilderment and grasps the wrist of Pumpkin, at his turn threatening him with his own gun. As Jules forces Pumpkin to sit down in front of him, Honey Bunny freaks out. [still 59] Jules tells her to be cool: "we're gonna be like three Fonzies. And what's Fonzie like?" (Tarantino 182)[39]. Jules does not want to shoot the criminal duo but he still has enough respect for his boss's property to refuse handing in the briefcase. Moreover, he went through a lot of trouble retrieving it and in a way, the briefcase is at the origin of the divine intervention he has experienced.

Jules is aware that his decision not to kill Pumpkin and Honey Bunny departs from the former course of events. "Normally both of your asses would be dead as fuckin' fried chicken. But you happened to pull this shit while I'm in a transitional period" (183). At that moment, Vincent storms in pointing his gun at Honey Bunny. Again, Jules urges the people who surround him – including Vincent – to be cool. Jules wants to keep control over the situation lest more people would be killed. [still 60] He talks reassuringly to Honey Bunny and asks Pumpkin to dig up his wallet. He allows Pumpkin to take the money out of the wallet and add it to their loot. Vincent immediately disagrees with Jules's actions: "Jules, if you give this nimrod fifteen hundred bucks, I'm gonna shoot 'em on general principle" (186). Vincent cannot understand that Jules is giving away his money like that. They are in complete control of the situation and Vincent is used to getting his way, like they did in the apartment of the young guys. But Jules has elected to follow another direction, a decision he explicates by reinterpreting the biblical passage he used to quote before executing his adversaries.

After quoting so-called Ezekiel 25:17 he admits that all this time he was exploiting an empty symbol:

> "I been saying that shit for years. And if you ever heard it, it meant your ass. I never really questioned what it meant. I thought it was just a coldblooded thing to say to a motherfucker 'fore you popped a cap in his ass. But I saw some shit this mornin' made me think twice" (186-187).

For the first time Jules acknowledges that his life, symbolised by the bible passage, was meaningless. In the light of the divine intervention, he experiences an urge not only to reformulate the denotation of the quote but also to construe his life from a different perspective.

While trying to phrase his conversion, Jules offers three possible interpretations of the bible passage. In this scene, the camera switches from Pumpkin to Jules and back, with Jules's gun always in prime focus. [still 61-62] At first, he suggests that Pumpkin is the evil man, that he is the righteous man, and that his gun is "the shepherd protecting my righteous ass in the valley of darkness" (187). According to Conard this interpretation describes Jules's life under the command of Marsellus: "Whatever he does (as ordered by Marsellus) is justified, and so he's the Righteous Man with his pistol protecting him. Whatever stands in his way is bad or evil by definition." In this explication, the Los Angeles crime world under the reign of Marsellus can be interpreted as the valley of darkness in which one rightfully resorts to violence to survive.

In the second interpretation, Jules sees Pumpkin as the righteous man and himself as the shepherd in a world that is evil and selfish. Here Jules alludes to the example of Caine he wanted to follow and "seems to go along with Jules's pseudo-religious attitude" (Conard). Yet, this vision appears to be idealised; Jules hides himself behind the predestination of his surroundings. The evil world "has made Jules do all the terrible things he's done up to that point" (Conard). Jules continues his idealisation by describing himself as the shepherd, because up to now he has done very little to guide others and has done little good, except in the eyes of Marsellus. If Jules were the shepherd, he should start with trying to save Pumpkin, but he buys Pumpkin's life instead.

Jules is aware of the ideal nature of his second interpretation. He likes this vision, "but that shit ain't the truth. The truth is you're weak. And I'm the tyranny of evil men" (Tarantino 187). Pumpkin is indeed in a weak position: he and his girlfriend are held at gunpoint by two professional hitmen. In the hierarchy topped by Marsellus the two coffee shop robbers are almost not worth mentioning. For years, Jules has executed the will of Marsellus and by killing the young guys earlier he carried out the tyranny of evil men. However, while doing so Jules has come to the insight that he needs to choose another path. This path is not self-evident but he is prepared to make an effort: "I'm trying real hard to be a shepherd" (Tarantino 187). He wants to be a good force and save the two small-time crooks who are "neither good enough to be righteous, nor strong enough to be as evil as Jules and Vincent" (Conard). Jules wants to break through the traditional chain of power. Not only does he refuse to assert his own powerful position in relation to Pumpkin and Honey Bunny, he also wants to escape from the supremacy of Marsellus himself.

Jules manages to persuade Vincent to let Pumpkin and Honey Bunny go. Nevertheless, Vincent has no tendency to adopt Jules's beliefs, he would rather continue his old way of life

dictated by narcissism and the orders of Marsellus. “His general principles are […] that whatever means are necessary to achieve his end are justified – the end (again) most often being determined by Marsellus Wallace” (Conard). Vincent’s continuance of his life shows in his date with Mia Wallace and, more specifically, in *The Gold Watch*. In this last story, Vincent is united with English Dave, as they both enter the dressing room of the boxer killed by Butch. Later, when Vincent is on a new job chasing Butch, he is teamed up with the boss himself. Marsellus has apparently left Vincent at Butch’s apartment to buy something to eat, which eventually leads to Vincent’s death and Butch running into his boss at the crossroads.

Pumpkin and Honey Bunny have left with their loot and soon Vincent and Jules, almost certainly together for the last time, leave the scene of the crime. Nevertheless, Peter Chumo observes that: “as Vincent and Jules put their guns in the waistbands of their shorts […] they are probably more alike than ever – they even walk in sync” (87). [still 63-64] However, Jules has made his final decision and from the information the viewer has from the rest of the film, Vincent’s future is clear.

At the end of the film, viewers have filmic evidence at their disposal to answer the question why Tarantino stopped the further development of the hold-up. In the three stories that separate the prologue and the epilogue, Jules has altered from a hitman into a wandering shepherd who tries hard to follow the righteous path. The viewers see none of the results this decision has for the future of Jules, but the fate of Pumpkin and Honey Bunny could be regarded as significant. The criminal couple survive because Jules surpasses the strict expectations that come with his hitman character. In this manner, they are able to escape a certain doom they, like Bonnie and Clyde, had met should they have encountered Jules before the divine intervention. “Tarantino establishes Jules as the moral center of his film, and, for this reason, *Pulp Fiction*’s achronological narrative takes on greater ethical force when Jules spares Pumpkin and Honey Bunny in the film's final moments” (Davis & Womack).

The interruption of the Pumpkin and Honey Bunny story makes the procedure Tarantino employs in the three core stories explicit. He sets off from a known starting point (a criminal couple planning a robbery) but finally the story makes a turnaround to arrive at unanticipated domains. The protagonists in this emblem of *Pulp Fiction* also express their will to break with the past; they no longer want to rob banks, but decide to hold up a place people usually do not expect to be robbed. Between the formulaic opening and the twist in the epilogue, Tarantino has offered three stories in which he operates from the same method. Every time he begins with “the oldest chestnuts in the world” (Dargis[l] 10), and then he deviates from a development

dictated by genre expectations. In addition, the three stories generate a reason that accounts for the divergence in the framing story.

The transformation of Jules is not the only important event that has happened 'in between'. At the core of *Pulp Fiction*, Butch has also encountered redemption. Tarantino has placed *The Gold Watch* at the centre of *Pulp Fiction* because it provides a prefiguration of Jules's metamorphosis. If one takes the chronological order of *Pulp Fiction* into account, it might not be logical to consider the last story in time as foreshadowing the first story, but Tarantino's construction allows for an interpretation of the events he – or the viewers – might have missed should he have followed the linear chronology. Hochenedel draws a similar conclusion in which she claims that: "the purpose for this [non-linear construction] may be to draw attention away from chronology so that the reader can focus on the deeper thematic organization of the film" (Hochenedel).

The Gold Watch and the story of Jules have an analogous evolution. As said before, both Butch and Jules make life-changing decisions that result in the escape from the governance of Marsellus. In the two stories empty, meaningless symbols gradually develop into symbols of &honour and redemption. For Butch the heritage of the watch is an empty symbol because it refers to a line of forefathers who were largely absent from Butch's life. When Butch has to struggle to retrieve the watch, and makes a gracious decision in the process, the object receives a genuine meaning. Butch is also connected to another meaningful symbol, the samurai sword, which "represents for Butch what the 'biblical' passage does for Jules" (Conard). Like the sword, the biblical quote epitomises a so-called profound significance when interpreted or employed righteously. Jules reconsiders the denotation of the bible passage after experienced an act of God. Vincent does not make such a decision and he has to pay; Butch, who is at that time not yet on his 'righteous path' towards Knoxville, kills him.

Both characters also show a similar attitude towards violence. Jules executes his opponents without hesitation, but while doing so God reveals himself to him. From this moment on Jules acts as a moderator: between Vincent and Jimmie, between Vincent and The Wolf, and between Pumpkin, Honey Bunny, and Vincent. Finally, he succeeds to solve a hectic situation without using violence. Butch, on his part, brutally kills his rival in the boxing ring during a – perhaps significantly – off screen fight. While Butch retrieves his watch, he kills Vincent in what could be described as an act of self-defence. Fleeing his apartment, he encounters Marsellus and, panic-stricken, he runs him over. Butch is about to give Marsellus his final blow before being interrupted by Maynard. With the luring possibility of escape ahead, Butch decides to use violence to liberate his former enemy; he chooses a weapon with great

symbolic value and deserves redemption. Butch alternates between brutal and justified violence, but finally decides to leave his life as a boxer – a prime example of male violence – behind.

The upheaval of a chronological order thus links with the themes of *Pulp Fiction*. Hochenedel highlights that Jules's transformation accounts for the film's structure:

> "Jules's metamorphosis is the keystone of *Pulp Fiction* and explains why the prologue and the epilogue, which are part of the same episode, had to be separated by the rest of the film. The film does not make chronological progress: it makes moral progress".

Tarantino has repeatedly stressed the moral dimension of *Pulp Fiction*, and while doing so admits that his film follows a rather classic model. The non-linear construction might give the film a post-modern cachet[40], but in essence, *Pulp Fiction* springs from classical roots. Tarantino confirms the classical organisation of his film when he accentuates the importance of the transformation of Jules:

> "His [Jules's] whole redemption is set up throughout the film, brick by brick, via a series of close shaves and narrow misses. I mean, *Pulp Fiction* is ultimately a film about forgiveness and mercy, albeit in a hard and brutal world" (O'Hagen 63).

Despite the attention for the significance of the temporal structure of *Pulp Fiction*, critics have also argued that Tarantino merely wanted to arrange his film in a more divergent and playful manner. Critics such as Christoph Haas stress that Tarantino is a director of style more than a director of substance: "In *Pulp Fiction* hat die Aufhebung des normalen Zeitablaufs rein ornamentalen Charakter" (Haas 691). Keeping in mind comments as these, one will obviously not tend to include *Pulp Fiction* in the film noir tradition in which the disruption of linear narrative introduces themes such as alienation, the problematic nature of narration and identity, and predestination. In comparison with neo-noirs such as *Memento* and *The Usual Suspects*[41], *Pulp Fiction* has very little to do with those typical noir themes. Its non-linear structure has thematic implications, but it stresses the moral development of the characters rather than raising typical noir questions.

When deciding for or against assigning a certain label to a film under discussion, one can rarely formulate a clear case. The same nonexistent problem presents itself when trying to decide whether *Pulp Fiction* is a film belonging to the noir tradition. In the course of this paper, it has become clear that the starting points of the stories that constitute *Pulp Fiction* show a connection with noir genres. Nevertheless, with *Pulp Fiction* Tarantino surmounts the clichés of the genre like some of his protagonists overcome time and their inevitable doom. Yet, it is not always clear whether Tarantino is able to rise above the oldest chestnuts of (noir)

cinema. Fried claims that: "Tarantino strides across genres and generations, conjuring a collage of American male heroism and sexual bravado. The film mocks the styles and idiosyncrasies of male cinematic archetypes, from the boss to the boxer to the bad-ass brother." Judging from this statement one might consider *Pulp Fiction* to be a parody of film noir, one that tackles a typical noir theme: masculinity. Tarantino however has too much respect for any type of films to make a parody. "I wanted to subvert the Hollywood staples, but with respect, not in a superior pastichey [sic] way" (O'Hagen 66). Tarantino intended to do pay tribute, went to work with genre formulas, and tried to reinvigorate the genre. "I love the idea of going into a genre and taking all the familiars we like and giving them back to you in new ways" (Dargis[II] 16). But while making a pastiche of the noir genre Tarantino deviated from his original intentions: "the jumping-off point was *Black Mask* magazine. Of course, it's not like *Black Mask* at all now, but that was the starting point" (Dargis[I] 10). Tarantino does not specify where he did come out, but probably he is referring to the redemption theme.

In relation to noir strategies, the redemption of Jules and Butch is a rather 'classic' turn. Whereas noir habitually offers a blurring distinction between good and bad, very often resulting in protagonists getting away with the crimes they have committed, *Pulp Fiction* clearly differentiates between Butch and Jules on the one hand and Vincent on the other: the first are granted redemption and the latter receives punishment.

Trying to reach a conclusion regarding the question whether *Pulp Fiction* belongs to the noir tradition, the pros and cons scattered throughout the film and this paper should be joined. For one, Tarantino is unmistakably connected to the crime genre: "*Pulp Fiction* was going to be my goodbye to the crime genre, at least for a while. It's a get-it-out-of-your-system movie […]" (Dargis[II] 16). Of course, the crime genre and noir are not entirely the same, but they are at least largely overlapping, although calling noir a subset of the crime genre might be oversimplifying the issue. As indicated throughout this paper, Tarantino certainly appeals to themes typical of noir. He has stated that he has "drawn to the genre for a whole series of reasons – because of its trashy resonance, its stress on slangy dialogue, its attention to speech and male behaviour, its interest in charting the modern urban landscape" (McLellan 57).

In *Pulp Fiction* and while shooting the film, Tarantino repeatedly refers to films noirs. Directing Bruce Willis as Butch on the set he said: "This is it! The camera's right on you. You're Robert Mitchum in *Thunder Road*"[42] (Webster 49). The film itself is packed with allusions to all sorts of films and T.V. shows, and a considerable amount of those references can be traced back to crime or noir films. Of course, one must not confuse alluding to a genre to with being of it, but in this case, the allusions contribute to the mood of the *Pulp Fiction*.

Several critics have picked up the noir label to describe *Pulp Fiction*. O'Hagan claims that Tarantino is "at the forefront of a new kind of cinema where the staple plots and characters of the film noir thriller are given a distinctly Nineties twist" (O'Hagan 61). This description undoubtedly places Tarantino in the (neo-)noir tradition defined in Spicer.

Despite arguments to the contrary, Tarantino himself claims that *Pulp Fiction* is not part of the noir tradition: "I don't do noir. I don't do neo-noir. I see *Pulp Fiction* as closer to modern-day crime fiction, a little closer to Charles Willeford[43], though I don't know if that describes it either" (Dargis[1]10). In the end, a statement like this does not provide a final answer. First, it is not surprising to see Tarantino incapable or (more liable) reluctant to label his own movie. Secondly, Tarantino refers to Charles Willeford, who writes pulp novels and had some of his novels adapted in the noir tradition.

For every critic who includes Tarantino in the noir tradition, another rises to disclaim his right to the noir tag. Woods compares the typical noir topics with *Pulp Fiction*'s themes and concludes that: "if you're looking for an incisive portrayal of the human condition pushed to its darkest extreme, then Tarantino's not your man" (Woods 6). This paper has repeatedly given examples to support this vision, but concluding that *Pulp Fiction* shares no significant thematic characteristics with film noir seems to be a bridge too far. Tarantino, to give a counterexample, develops the concept of male heroism in every of the three stories. In the process, he opposes a hitman to an innocent femme fatale who evolves into a damsel in distress, introduces different varieties of male bonding, and has a male kingpin raped.

Furthermore, the majority of *Pulp Fiction*'s characters are subject to a power outside their control. The authoritative position of Marsellus Wallace is the driving force behind every character in the three stories. Besides the presence of Marsellus, the protagonists also need to deal with time pressure. Vincent eventually loses his struggle with time by remaining under Marsellus's service. Butch and Jules, who "if it takes forever […] will wait forever" for God to put him in his place (Tarantino 174), escape Marsellus and do not have to worry about time.

These themes could help ascribing the noir label to *Pulp Fiction*, yet Woods has a point when he claims that *Pulp Fiction* does not deliver a depiction of man or, to a minor extent, woman[44] in the noir tradition. After all, Tarantino never intended to incorporate that side of noir cinema in his film. Perhaps that is what Tarantino meant by saying, "I don't do noir". Surely, Tarantino included aspects of noir, but he integrated characteristics of a wide range of other genres as well. Perhaps a similar approach to *Pulp Fiction* has instigated O'Brien to solve the noir discussion by declaring that: "neither neo-noir nor a parody of noir, *Pulp Fiction* is more

a guided tour of an infernal park decorated with cultural detritus" (72). Should *Pulp Fiction* then be described as noir light? The colour grey is probably far from defining *Pulp Fiction*, so perhaps it should stay a film without the noir label, a shapeless mass of matter. Nevertheless, keeping the discussion on *Pulp Fiction*'s structure in mind, it is highly questionable to define *Pulp Fiction* as shapeless.

Spicer also tries to solve the question of Tarantino's bond with film noir. He describes *Pulp Fiction* as "a contemporary classic, quintessentially postmodern, the most extreme of neo-noir hybrids" (170). In his attempt to define Tarantino as a "postmodern noir auteur", Spicer resorts to another problematic concept. The introduction of the postmodern label might complicate the question of this paper, but at the same time it offers a set of terms which can be adopted in a further analyse. Spicer incorporates Tarantino's films in the noir tradition, because "if [they] are lavishly eclectic, their central reference point is crime fiction and film noir, but seen through the eyes of a postmodern sensibility that adapts and changes their form" (171). While indicating that *Pulp Fiction* is linked with noir, this paper has encountered the postmodern label, yet the treatment of this – undoubtedly interesting – subject goes beyond the scope of this paper.

Despite the emphasis Spicer put on Tarantino's postmodern character, he highlights a feature relatively distant from the postmodern/neo-noir discussion and allows introducing the visual aspect. Spicer refers to what Tarantino said on the lighting of *Pulp Fiction* in his interview with Dargis: "His style, very noticeably, eschews chiaroscuro. *Pulp Fiction* was shot by Andrej Sekula on 50 ASA film stock whose lustrous image was the closest contemporary equivalent to 1950s Technicolor" (171)[45]. Tarantino reformulates the visual style of film noir by shooting great contrasts: "I wanted the reds to be red and the blacks to be black" (Dargis[II] 19). Other remnants of the noir's visual methods can be found in various shots pointed to throughout this paper. Tarantino's shots framed by doors and bars came across in Vincent's repeated visits to the bathroom [still 54-57] and on other occasions [still 15, 52, 65]. Tarantino has also pointed to his use of odd angles and fragmented space, a technique that shows noir's inheritance of German Expressionism and the Weimar Street Film. In the first parts, this paper has already expanded on Tarantino's bond with the French New Vague, characterised by an interest in visual tricks referring to noir. Like noir, *Pulp Fiction* challenges the position of the viewer as an ideal observer. A shot of Marsellus chasing Butch is a fine example of this technique. [still 66] Furthermore, one could also point to Tarantino's use of excessive close-ups. [still 66] Yet, he might have borrowed this technique from one of his cinematic heroes, Sergio Leone, rather than from film noir. Nevertheless, *Pulp Fiction* shares a visual attention

for its protagonists with noir films. This focus on the characters is also reflected in the nearly absent long establishing shot, which is turned away in favour of shots concentrating on interiors like motel rooms, clubs, cars, and diners. The character of Mia Wallace has proven to be a strong link with film noir, and her visual presence and fragmented introduction contribute to this allusion to the mystique and sensuality of many types of woman in noir cinema. [still 16-22, 27] The 'opponent' of Mia, Vincent, also provides some shots reminiscent of noir; his self-confrontation in the mirror – a typical noir shot – is one of the many examples. [still 55] Some of the techniques originally assigned to noir cinema have become widespread in contemporary films, but *Pulp Fiction* shows a great influence from the visual style of noir.

This paper seems to have offered sufficient arguments to assign the noir label to *Pulp Fiction*, nevertheless without being too constricted and keeping an eye for other influences and methods. Of course, who else than Tarantino obtains the last word on this matter: "ultimately, what I'm trying to do is merge sophisticated storytelling with lurid subject matter […] that makes for an entertaining night at the movies" (O'Hagan 66). Neither the label noir, nor elusive interpretations of its contents were the starting point for Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction*. It is 'mere entertainment', and though an important film in the nineties, the statement – perhaps too easily – solves the issue of whether or not to assign the noir label.

NOTES

[1] The terms modern and post-modern noir are taken from Spicer, I use them to refer to the second and third wave of films noirs, distancing myself from the implications these terms might have concerning the problematic labels 'modern' and 'post-modern'.

[2] Manohla Dargis and many other critics make little or no distinction in using the terms 'pulp' and 'film noir'. The relation between those two terms may not be so straightforward as it seems at first sight. Nevertheless, a profound treatment goes beyond the scope of this paper.

[3] Louis Malle (1932 - 1995) "par excellence le cineaste du scandale" (Tulard 502), directed controversial films such as *Les Amants* (1959), in which he tackles the taboo on sexuality, *Le Feu Follet* (1963), about suicide, and *La Petite/Pretty Baby* (1978) about child prostitution. (Tulard 502 and Hommel & Schotman 371)

[4] Samuel Fuller (1911 – 1985) was a crime journalist, a screenplay writer and novelist before he started directing after the Second World War. He only became known when French critics paid attention to his films, in which he evoked a pessimistic view on the mad struggle for life using horrifying images and complicated – but beautiful – camerawork. (Hochenedel & Schotman 212)

Howard Hawks (1896 – 1977), who received a lot of attention in the *Cahiers du Cinéma*, achieved fame with *Scarface* (1932), a gangster film about Al Capone, and was active in different genres: science fiction as producer and co-director of *The Thing* (1951), comedy in *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1953), film noir in *The Big Sleep* (1946), western *Rio Bravo* (1959). (Tulard 355-356)

Orson Welles (1915 – 1985) was active (most often simultaneously) as screenplay writer, director and actor. He is famous for his masterpiece *Citizen Kane* (1940). He also wrote, directed, acted in dark thrillers such as *The Lady from Shanghai* (1946) and *Touch of Evil* (1958) and made adaptations of Shakespeare (i.e. *Macbeth* in 1948) and Kafka (*The Trial* in 1963).

[5] Truffaut based his film on *Down There* (1956), a novel by David Goodis:

"David Goodis (1917 – 1967) was one of the most interesting and influential crime novelists published during the classic era of pulp fiction but, although cited by numerous novelists and adapted for the cinema by notable film-makers, he remains a relatively obscure figure"

(www.bfi.org.uk/showing/nft/featurearchive/crimescene2000/special.html)

[6] *Chinatown* (1974), a film in the noir tradition directed by Roman Polanski and set in the thirties starring Jack Nicholson, Faye Dunaway, and John Huston (Bishoff 84).

[7] Jean Pierre Chartier published an article, "Americans also make 'noir' films" in *La Revue du Cinéma* No. 3 (November 1946), in which he attributes the actual invention of the term 'film noir' to cineaste Nino Frank (Silver & Ward 1).

[8] *The Maltese Falcon* (1941), remake of *The Maltese Falcon* (1931) and *Satan met a Lady* (1936), directed by John Huston, starring Humphrey Bogart, Sydney Greenstreet, and Peter Lorre, based on a Dashiell Hammett novel. (Bishoff 246)

[9] *The Killers* (1964) directed by Don Siegel, starring Lee Marvin. (Bishoff 216)

[10] Jean-Pierre Melville (1917 – 1973) was a predecessor and example for New Wave directors. He is most important for his 'policiers', in which he adopted the American style and at the same time remained faithful to the French cinema.

Martin Scorcese (°1942) had a significant role in the revival of noir in the seventies with his *Mean Streets* (1972), *Taxi Driver* (1974), and *Raging Bull* (1980), all starring Robert De Niro. He also directed *Goodfellas* (1990).

[11] Jean Cocteau (1889 – 1963) was active in various arts, but directed his five most important films between 1945 and 1959. These films form the autobiography of a poet. His films appeal to dream and magic, but are unmistakeably based on reality (Hommel & Schotman 120).

[12] "The Bible-spouting killer is cribbed from Charles Laughton's *Night of the Hunter*" (Simon).

Night of the Hunter (1955) is the only film directed by actor Charles Laughton and featured Robert Mitchum as a psychotic murderer. [still 67]

[13] Tarantino further elaborates his foot fetishism – or at least his fascination for Uma Thurman's feet – in Kill Bill, especially in volume 1.

[14] Tarantino's casting of Steve Buscemi as waiter might allude to Buscemi's role in *Reservoir Dogs*, in which his refusal to tip the waitress starts an extended discussion on the job of waitresses.

[15] Marilyn Monroe (1926 – 1962). *Niagara* (1953), a film noir by Henry Hathaway, delivered her stardom and her success was followed with roles in *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1953) by Howard Hawks and *How to Marry a Millionaire* (1953) by Jean Negulesco, also starring Lauren Bacall. Her last completed film was *The Misfits* (1961), written by her husband Arthur Miller and directed by John Huston. "A global sensation in her lifetime, Marilyn's popularity has extended beyond star status to icon. Today, the name 'Marilyn Monroe' is synonymous with beauty, sensuality and effervescence" (www.marilynmonroe.com/about/bio4.html).

Mamie Van Doren (°1933) was signed by Universal Studios at age 18 with the hope that they could make her their answer to Fox's Marilyn Monroe.

Jayne Mansfield (1933 – 1967) was a sexual icon of the fifties and sixties. She had "a succession of roles as sex kittens and dumb blonde bimbos" and "became a sort of poor man's Marilyn Monroe".

(www.imdb.com)

[16] *The Deer Hunter* (1978) directed by Michael Cimino, starring Robert DeNiro, John Savage, Meryl Streep, and Christopher Walken, a story about the life of young dockworkers before, during, and after their service in the Vietnam War (Bishoff 107).

[17] Winocki is the name of John Garfield's character in *Air Force*, a 1943 Howard Hawks film.
[18] Butch receives his orders from Marsellus at the beginning of *Vincent Vega and Marsellus Wallace's Wife*.
[19] *The Killers* (1946), directed by Robert Siodmak and starring Burt Lancaster and Ava Gardner, was about the investigation on the murder of an ex-boxer. (Bishoff 216)
Body and Soul (1947), a classic boxing film directed by Robert Rossen and starring John Garfield who brutally works himself up to become a famous boxer. (Bishoff 60)
The Set-Up (1949) directed by Robert Wise and starring Robert Ryan, brings the stern story of a boxer who is forced to retire but refuses to give up and go astray. (Bishoff 348)
[20] Marsellus is repeatedly shot (with a camera) from the back. This might contribute to the mystification of his figure. The king of the Los Angeles crime world is only visible in his entirety in *The Gold Watch* story.
[21] English Dave has already appeared in Marsellus's bar when Vincent and Jules returned the briefcase. Apparently, he has replaced Jules as Vincent's partner. This change will be important in the final conclusions of this paper.
[22] Butch's further explanation about how he feels about killing his opponent, who deserved what he got "for fuckin' up my sport" (Tarantino 94), is cut from the final edition of the film.
[23] *Modesty Blaise* is a character created by Peter O'Donnell (°1920) in 1962. A series of comic strips, novels, and films about its main character, a female secret agent, followed.
(www.imdb.com)
[24] Tarantino has often acknowledged the influence of Sergio Leone, famous for his western trilogy *Per un pugno di dollari* (1964), *Per qualche dollaro in più* (1966*), Il buono, il brutto, il cattivo* (1967), and his *C'era una volta il west* (1968). Leone is not only of great importance in *Pulp Fiction*, he is also of great significance when analysing both volumes of *Kill Bill.* This paper, however, cannot incorporate a further elaboration of this influence on Tarantino's films. (Tulard 466)
[25] The Louisville slugger is the official bat of the Major Baseball League.
[26] *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974), a horror classic directed by Tobe Hooper.
The Yakusa (1975) directed by Sydney Pollack, starring Robert Mitchum and Takakura Ken.
[27] In the screenplay, Tarantino refers to Takakura Ken: "Holding the sword pointed downward, Takakura Ken-style, he [Butch] disappears through the red curtains to take care of business" (Tarantino 128).
Takakura Ken (°1933) is known as "the Japanese Clint Eastwood" and despite a variety of roles he remains "the quintessential stoic and chivalrous yakuza". He first appeared in a Hollywood production in Sydney Pollack's *The Yakuza* (1975), also starring Robert Mitchum.
(www.japan-zone.com/modern/takakura_ken.shtml)
[28] "The path of the righteous man is beset on all sides by the inequities of the selfish and the tyranny of evil men. Blessed is he who, in the name of charity and good will, shepherds the weak through the valley of the darkness. For he is truly his brother's keeper and the finder of lost children. And I will strike down upon thee with great vengeance upon you" (Tarantino 186).
[29] Paul Arthur has an article on Los Angeles in crime films in which he distinguishes Los Angeles from the other city equally important in noir: New York.
Arthur, Paul. "Los Angeles as scene of the crime". *Film Comment* July – August 1996.
<www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1069/is_n4_v32/ai_18512971/pg_1>
[30] *Point of no return* (1993), by John Badham starring Bridget Fonda, Gabriel Byrne, and Harvey Keitel as Victor the Cleaner. It is a remake of *La Femme Nikita* (1990) by Luc Besson who also directed *Léon* (1994) about a professional assassin, cleaner played by Jean Reno.
[31] In this notes he describes Vincent as Dean Martin (1917 – 1995). He was an actor-singer who teamed up with Jerry Lewis to form a very successful duo, later he became part of the famous Rat Pack and starred in *Ocean's Eleven* (1960) and *Rio Bravo* (1959). From 1965 he hosted one of the most popular T.V.-shows. "If there had to be one image for cool, the one man to fit it would be Dean Martin".
(www.imdb.com)
[32] *Superfly T.N.T.* (1973) a cheap, badly directed film by Ron O'Neal about a black ex-drug dealer (Bishoff 375).
The Guns of Navarone (1961) an explosive action film directed by J. Lee Thompson, starring Gregory Peck (Bishoff 172).
Jimmie Walker (°1947) acted in sitcom *Good Times* (1974 – 1979) and in *The Guyver* (1991). He played the role of stingy customer in *Pulp Fiction* parody *Plump Fiction* (1997).
(www.imdb.com)
[33] While doing so, The Wolf addresses Vincent as Lash Larue (Tarantino 163), a reference to actor Al 'Lash' La Rue (°1917 – 1996). He looked and talked like Humphrey Bogart, and depended on his action scenes in his westerns. He was popular but his private life was a mess. (Hommel & Schotman 330)
[34] The Wolf says to Raquel: "Say goodbye, Raquel", upon which she answers: "Goodbye, Raquel" (Tarantino 169). This little wordplay echoes the "say something"-joke by Mia Wallace earlier.
[35] Cary Grant (1904 – 1986), one of the best and most important actors of all time, played in films of George Cukor, Howard Hawks and Alfred Hitchcock (Hommel & Schotman 232).
[36] The expression 'according to Hoyle' dates back to Edmond Hoyle (1672- 1769) and reflects "his generally-perceived authoritativeness on the subject" (www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edmond_Hoyle). There is a silent film entitled *According to*

Hoyle (1922) by W.S. Van Dyke.
(www.imdb.com)
[37] David Carradine (°1936) plays the role of Bill in Tarantino's *Kill Bill*.
In *Kung Fu* (1972-75) Shaolin priest Kwai Chang Caine, "after avenging the death of his teacher, […] flees China to the American West and helps people defending the weak and fighting against the evil while being pursued by Chinese bounty hunters".
(www.imdb.com)
[38] In her interpretation Jewers also includes Tarantino's *True Romance* and, particularly, *Reservoir Dogs*.
[39] Fonzie (Arthur Fonzerelli) is the character, known for his cool manner, played by Henry Winkler in the T.V.-show *Happy Days* (1974-84).
[40] Once again, this paper cannot but distance itself from a terminological discussion concerning the modern or postmodern nature of *Pulp Fiction*, if a final definite answer could be proposed at all.
[41] *Memento* (2000), based on a short story by Jonathan Nolan, directed by Christopher Nolan, starring Carrie Anne Moss and Guy Pearce. The film obscures the notions of truth and memory in its depiction of a young man who suffers from amnesia in his puzzling search for the killer of his wife. Christopher Nolan also directed *Insomnia* (2002), in which tackles another state of mind, starring Al Pacino and Robin Williams.
The Usual Suspects (1995), directed by Bryan Singer, stars Stephen Baldwin, Gabriel Byrne, Kevin Spacey, and Benicio Del Toro. Roger 'Verbal' Kint (Spacey) sets up an intricate intrigue during a police interrogation.
[42] *Thunder Road* (1958), by Arthur Ripley, starring Robert Mitchum. A veteran from the Korean War returns home and faces gangsters and the police trying to take over the family business.
(www.imdb.com)
[43] Charles Willeford (1919 – 1988). Three of his novels have resulted in film adaptations: *Cockfighter* (1974), *Miami Blues* (1990), and *The Woman Chaser* (1999) novel. His novels are faithful to 60s pulp literature and his the film adaptations show noir characteristics.
(www.imdb.com & www.dennismcmillan.com/charleswillefo/index.html)
[44] At least in the brief and largely stereotypical treatment of women Tarantino approaches film noir.
[45] Spicer quotes Tarantino from Dargis[II] page 19.

Pumpkin and Honey Bunny

Bonnie and Clyde

Anna Karina ~ Mia Wallace

(1)

The mysterious briefcase

The "original"

Kiss Me Deadly – Robert Aldrich

Marsellus Wallace's

The briefcase – Vincent

The Briefcase – Pumpkin

Gangster Style

Melville's *Le Samouraï* (2)

(3) A shot in *Le Samouraï*, reminiscent of Tarantino's shot of Pumpkin

(see still 61)

Gangster Style

Howard Hawks's
Scarface (4)

Martin Scorsese's
Goodfellas (5)

Gangster Style

In Tarantino's *Reservoir Dogs* (1991)

Jules & Vincent : “faultless”

Jules & Vincent's transformation – phase 1

Jules & Vincent's transformation – phase 2: strip 'n spray

Jules & Vincent's transformation – phase 3: completed

Let’s hang back

Fabienne & Butch in motel room – forced perspective

The fragmented mystification of Mrs. Mia Wallace – her lips

The fragmented mystification of Mrs. Mia Wallace – the hand in control

The fragmented mystification of Mrs. Mia Wallace - portrait

The fragmented mystification of Mrs. Mia Wallace – her feet

Jackrabbit Slim's – Mia's sensuality – straw

Jackrabbit Slim's – Mia's sensuality – cherry

Jackrabbit Slim's – Mia's sensuality – the last straw

“Marilyn Monroe”

Vincent & Mia's return home

Vincent & Mia's return home – tango-style

Vincent & Mia's return home – tango-style

Vincent & Mia's return home – a comfortable silence

Mia’s horripilating resurrection – Lance sets the example

The Shape in Carpenter's *Halloween* (1978)

Mia's horripilating resurrection – Vincent takes the plunge

Mia’s horripilating resurrection – the vamp awakes

Mia’s horripilating resurrection – the vamp awakes – part 2

Vincent & Mia shake hands

Captain Koons's monologue shot from the perspective of the young Butch

Travis Bickle – Robert De Niro (*Taxi Driver*)

(7)

(8) De Niro and Scorsese in a taxi scene similar to *Pulp Fiction*'s

One of the ‘mystifying’ shots from Marsellus’s back

Black-and-white process screen

Butch Coolidge & Esmeralda Villalobos

Butch & Marcellus at the crossroads

Psycho - Hitchcock

Janet Leigh sees her boss at the crossroads

Butch’s moment of doubt: shall I stay or shall I go to Tennessee?

Butch’s conversion: weapon #1

Butch’s conversion: weapon #2

Butch’s conversion: weapon #3

Butch’s conversion: revelation

Butch’s conversion: weapon #4

Butch in Takakura Ken-style

Butch – Time is on his side

Vincent and Jules – Dazed and confused

A madman in a lawless town

Mr. Wolf: “It’s about thirty minutes away. I’ll be there in ten”.

Mr. Wolf's arrival not even ten minutes later

Framed shot of Mr. Wolf and Jimmie

Jimmie – Tarantino assuming "camera position"

Vincent's repeated visits to the restroom

Vincent’s self-confrontation at Mia’s

Vincent after his last toilet visit

Vincent’s final curtain

Pumpkin approaches from Jules's point of view

Honey Bunny freaks out

Jules keeps cool, but cares about the lifes of the others

In true gangster style Jules keeps Pumpkin at gun point,…

… but while doing so he reinterprets his lifestyle.

Vincent & Jules in their final moments as a duo – 1

Vincent & Jules in their final moments as a duo – 2

Butch escapes from his apartment

Marsellus (in the distance) chases Butch (in close-up)

Jules's example

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